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Pro C# 2005 and the .NET 2.0 Platform

Exploring the .NET universe using curly brackets

THIRD EDITION

Andrew Troelsen



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Pro C# 2005 and the .NET 2.0 Platform



Andrew Troelsen

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Pro C# 2005 and the .NET 2.0 Platform

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I would like to dedicate this book to my mother, Mary Troelsen. Mom, thanks for all of your support over the years and the years to come. Oh yeah, and thanks for not busting my chops when I came home with the red Mohawk.

Luv ya,

Pooch

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Introduction

I remember a time years ago when I proposed a book to Apress regarding a forthcoming software SDK code-named Next Generation Windows Services (NGWS). As you may be aware, NGWS eventually became what we now know as the .NET platform. My research of the C# programming language and the .NET platform took place in parallel with the authoring of the initial manuscript. It was a fantastic project; however, I must confess that it was more than a bit nerve-racking writing about a technology that was undergoing drastic changes over the course of its development. Thankfully, after many sleepless nights, the first edition of *C# and the .NET Platform* was published in conjunction with the release of .NET 1.0 Beta 2, circa the summer of 2001.

Since that point, I have been extremely happy and grateful to see that this text was very well received by the press and, most important, by readers. Over the years it was nominated as a Jolt Award finalist (I lost . . . crap!) and for the 2003 Referenceware Excellence Award in the programming book category (I won? Cool!).

The second edition of this text (*C# and the .NET Platform, Second Edition*) provided me the opportunity to expand upon the existing content with regard to version 1.1 of the .NET platform. Although the second edition of the book did offer a number of new topics, a number of chapters and examples were unable to make it into the final product.

Now that the book has entered its third edition, I am happy to say that the manuscript contains (almost) all of the topics and examples I was unable to cram into the previous versions. Not only does this edition of the text account for the numerous bells and whistles brought about by .NET 2.0 but it also incorporates a number of chapters that have long been written but not yet published (such as content on the common intermediate language, or CIL).

As with the earlier editions, this third edition presents the C# programming language and .NET base class libraries using a friendly and approachable tone. I have never understood the need some technical authors have to spit out prose that reads more like a GRE vocabulary study guide than a readable book. As well, this new edition remains focused on providing you with the information you need to build software solutions today, rather than spending too much time examining esoteric details that few individuals will ever actually care about.

We're a Team, You and I

Technology authors write for a demanding group of people (I should know—I'm one of them). You know that building software solutions using any platform is extremely detailed and is very specific to your department, company, client base, and subject matter. Perhaps you work in the electronic publishing industry, develop systems for the state or local government, or work at NASA or a branch of the military. Speaking for myself, I have developed children's educational software, various n-tier systems, and numerous projects within the medical and financial industries. The chances are almost 100 percent that the code you write at your place of employment has little to do with the code I write at mine (unless we happened to work together previously!).

Therefore, in this book, I have deliberately chosen to avoid creating examples that tie the example code to a specific industry or vein of programming. Given this, I choose to explain C#, OOP, the CLR, and the .NET 2.0 base class libraries using industry-agnostic examples. Rather than having every blessed example fill a grid with data, calculate payroll, or whatnot, I'll stick to subject matter we

can all relate to: automobiles (with some geometric structures and employees thrown in for good measure). And that's where you come in.

My job is to explain the C# programming language and the core aspects of the .NET platform the best I possibly can. As well, I will do everything I can to equip you with the tools and strategies you need to continue your studies at this book's conclusion.

Your job is to take this information and apply it to your specific programming assignments. I obviously understand that your projects most likely don't revolve around automobiles with pet names, but that's what applied knowledge is all about! Rest assured, once you understand the concepts presented within this text, you will be in a perfect position to build .NET solutions that map to your own unique programming environment.

An Overview of This Book

Pro C# 2005 and the .NET 2.0 Platform, Third Edition is logically divided into five distinct sections, each of which contains some number of chapters that somehow "belong together." If you read the earlier editions of this text, you will notice some similarities in chapter names, but be aware that just about every page has been updated with new content and expanded examples. You will also notice that some topics in the first and second editions (such as object serialization and the .NET garbage collector) have been moved into a chapter of their very own.

Of course, as you would hope, the third edition contains several brand-new chapters (including a chapter devoted to the syntax and semantics of CIL) and detailed coverage of 2.0-specific features. These things being said, here is a part-by-part and chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the text.

Part 1: Introducing C# and the .NET Platform

The purpose of Part 1 is to acclimate you to the core aspects of the .NET platform, the .NET type system, and various development tools (many of which are open source) used during the construction of .NET applications. Along the way, you will also check out some basic details of the C# programming language.

Chapter 1: The Philosophy of .NET

This first chapter functions as the backbone for the remainder of the text. We begin by examining the world of traditional Windows development and uncover the shortcomings with the previous state of affairs. The primary goal of this chapter, however, is to acquaint you with a number of .NET-centric building blocks, such as the common language runtime (CLR), Common Type System (CTS), Common Language Specification (CLS), and base class libraries. Also, you will also take an initial look at the C# programming language and .NET assembly format, and you'll examine the platform-independent nature of the .NET platform and the role of the Common Language Infrastructure (CLI).

Chapter 2: Building C# Applications

The goal of this chapter is to introduce you to the process of compiling and debugging C# source code files using various tools and techniques. First, you will learn how to make use of the command-line compiler (`csc.exe`) and C# response files. Over the remainder of the chapter, you will examine numerous IDEs, including TextPad, SharpDevelop, Visual C# 2005 Express, and (of course) Visual Studio 2005. As well, you will be exposed to a number of open source tools (Vil, NAnt, NDoc, etc.), which any .NET developer should have in their back pocket.

Part 2: The C# Programming Language

This part explores all the gory details of the C# programming language, including the new syntactical constructs introduced with .NET 2.0. As well, Part 2 exposes you to each member of the CTS (classes, interfaces, structures, enumerations, and delegates) and the construction of generic types.

Chapter 3: C# Language Fundamentals

This chapter examines the core constructs of the C# programming language. Here you will come to understand basic class construction techniques, the distinction between value types and reference types, boxing and unboxing, and the role of everybody's favorite base class, `System.Object`. Also, Chapter 3 illustrates how the .NET platform puts a spin on various commonplace programming constructs, such as enumerations, arrays, and string processing. Finally, this chapter examines a number of 2.0-specific topics including "nullable data types."

Chapter 4: Object-Oriented Programming with C#

The role of Chapter 4 is to examine the details of how C# accounts for each "pillar" of OOP: encapsulation, inheritance, and polymorphism. Once you have examined the keywords and the syntax used to build class hierarchies, you will then look at the role of XML code comments.

Chapter 5: Understanding Object Lifetime

This chapter examines how the CLR manages memory using the .NET garbage collector. Here you will come to understand the role of application roots, object generations, and the `System.GC` type. Once you understand the basics, the remainder of this chapter covers the topics of "disposable objects" (via the `IDisposable` interface) and the finalization process (via the `System.Object.Finalize()` method).

Chapter 6: Understanding Structured Exception Handling

The point of this chapter is to discuss how to handle runtime anomalies in your code base through the use of structured exception handling. Not only will you learn about the C# keywords that allow you to handle such problems (`try`, `catch`, `throw`, and `finally`), but you will also come to understand the distinction between application-level and system-level exceptions. In addition, this chapter examines various tools within Visual Studio 2005 that allow you to debug the exceptions that have escaped your view.

Chapter 7: Interfaces and Collections

The material in this chapter builds upon your understanding of object-based development by covering the topic of interface-based programming. Here you will learn how to define types that support multiple behaviors, how to discover these behaviors at runtime, and how to selectively hide particular behaviors using *explicit interface implementation*. To showcase the usefulness of interface types, the remainder of this chapter examines the `System.Collections` namespace.

Chapter 8: Callback Interfaces, Delegates, and Events

The purpose of Chapter 8 is to demystify the delegate type. Simply put, a .NET *delegate* is an object that "points" to other methods in your application. Using this pattern, you are able to build systems that allow multiple objects to engage in a two-way conversation. After you have examined the use of .NET delegates (including numerous 2.0-specific features such as anonymous methods), you will then be introduced to the C# `event` keyword, which is used to simplify the manipulation of raw delegate programming.

Chapter 9: Advanced C# Type Construction Techniques

This chapter deepens your understanding of the C# programming language by introducing a number of advanced programming techniques. For example, you will learn how to overload operators and create custom conversion routines (both implicit and explicit), build type indexers, and manipulate C-style pointers within a `*.cs` code file.

Chapter 10: Understanding Generics

As of .NET 2.0, the C# programming language has been enhanced to support a new feature of the CTS termed *generics*. As you will see, generic programming greatly enhances application performance and type safety. Not only will you explore various generic types within the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace, but you will also learn how to build your own generic methods and types (with and without constraints).

Part 3: Programming with .NET Assemblies

Part 3 dives into the details of the .NET assembly format. Not only will you learn how to deploy and configure .NET code libraries, but you will also come to understand the internal composition of a .NET binary image. This part also explains the role of .NET attributes and the construction of mutilthreaded applications. Later chapters examine some fairly low-level details (such as object context) and the syntax and semantics of CIL.

Chapter 11: Introducing .NET Assemblies

From a very high level, *assembly* is the term used to describe a managed `*.dll` or `*.exe` file. However, the true story of .NET assemblies is far richer than that. Here you will learn the distinction between single-file and multifile assemblies, and how to build and deploy each entity. You'll examine how private and shared assemblies may be configured using XML-based `*.config` files and publisher policy assemblies. Along the way, you will investigate the internal structure of the global assembly cache (GAC) and the role of the .NET Framework 2.0 configuration utility.

Chapter 12: Type Reflection, Late Binding, and Attribute-Based Programming

Chapter 12 continues our examination of .NET assemblies by checking out the process of runtime type discovery via the `System.Reflection` namespace. Using these types, you are able to build applications that can read an assembly's metadata on the fly. You will learn how to dynamically activate and manipulate types at runtime using *late binding*. The final topic of this chapter explores the role of .NET attributes (both standard and custom). To illustrate the usefulness of each of these topics, the chapter concludes with the construction of an extendable Windows Forms application.

Chapter 13: Processes, AppDomains, Contexts, and CLR Hosts

Now that you have a solid understanding of assemblies, this chapter dives much deeper into the composition of a loaded .NET executable. The first goal is to illustrate the relationship between processes, application domains, and contextual boundaries. Once these terms have been qualified, you will then understand exactly how the CLR itself is hosted by the Windows operating system and deepen your understanding of `mscoree.dll`. The information presented here is a perfect lead-in to Chapter 14.

Chapter 14: Building Multithreaded Applications

This chapter examines how to build multithreaded applications and illustrates a number of techniques you can use to author thread-safe code. The chapter opens by revisiting the .NET delegate type in order to understand a delegate's intrinsic support for asynchronous method invocations. Next, you will investigate the types within the `System.Threading` namespace. You will look at numerous types (`Thread`, `ThreadStart`, etc.) that allow you to easily create additional threads of execution.

Chapter 15: Understanding CIL and the Role of Dynamic Assemblies

The goal of this chapter is twofold. In the first half (more or less), you will examine the syntax and semantics of CIL in much greater detail than in previous chapters. The remainder of this chapter covers the role of the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace. Using these types, you are able to build software that is capable of generating .NET assemblies in memory at runtime. Formally speaking, assemblies defined and executed in memory are termed *dynamic assemblies*.

Part 4: Programming with the .NET Libraries

By this point in the text, you have a solid handle on the C# language and the details of the .NET assembly format. Part 4 leverages your newfound knowledge by exploring a number of namespaces within the base class libraries, including file I/O, the .NET remoting layer, Windows Forms development, and database access using ADO.NET.

Chapter 16: The System.IO Namespace

As you can gather from its name, the `System.IO` namespace allows you to interact with a machine's file and directory structure. Over the course of this chapter, you will learn how to programmatically create (and destroy) a directory system as well as move data into and out of various streams (file-based, string-based, memory-based, etc.).

Chapter 17: Understanding Object Serialization

This chapter examines the object serialization services of the .NET platform. Simply put, *serialization* allows you to persist the state of an object (or a set of related objects) into a stream for later use. *Deserialization* (as you might expect) is the process of plucking an object from the stream into memory for consumption by your application. Once you understand the basics, you will then learn how to customize the serialization process via the `ISerializable` interface and a set of new attributes introduced with .NET 2.0.

Chapter 18: The .NET Remoting Layer

Contrary to popular belief, XML web services are not the only way to build distributed applications under the .NET platform. Here you will learn about the .NET remoting layer. As you will see, the CLR supports the ability to easily pass objects between application and machine boundaries using marshal-by-value (MBV) and marshal-by-reference (MBR) semantics. Along the way, you will learn how to alter the runtime behavior of a distributed .NET application in a declarative manner using XML configuration files.

Chapter 19: Building a Better Window with System.Windows.Forms

This chapter begins your examination of the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace. Here you will learn the details of building traditional desktop GUI applications that support menu systems, toolbars, and status bars. As you would hope, various design-time aspects of Visual Studio 2005 will be examined, as well as a number of .NET 2.0 Windows Forms types (`MenuStrip`, `ToolStrip`, etc.).

Chapter 20: Rendering Graphical Data with GDI+

This chapter covers how to dynamically render graphical data in the Windows Forms environment. In addition to discussing how to manipulate fonts, colors, geometric images, and image files, this chapter examines hit testing and GUI-based drag-and-drop techniques. You will learn about the new .NET resource format, which as you may suspect by this point in the text is based on XML data representation.

Chapter 21: Programming with Windows Forms Controls

This final Windows-centric chapter will examine numerous GUI widgets that ship with the .NET Framework 2.0. Not only will you learn how to program against various Windows Forms controls, but you will also learn about dialog box development and Form inheritance. As well, this chapter examines how to build *custom* Windows Forms controls that integrate into the IDE.

Chapter 22: Database Access with ADO.NET

ADO.NET is the data access API of the .NET platform. As you will see, you are able to interact with the types of ADO.NET using a connected and disconnected layer. Over the course of this chapter, you will have the chance to work with both modes of ADO.NET, and you'll learn about several new .NET 2.0 ADO.NET topics, including the data provider factory model, connection string builders, and asynchronous database access.

Part 5: Web Applications and XML Web Services

Part 5 is devoted to the construction of ASP.NET web applications and XML web services. As you will see in the first two chapters of this section, ASP.NET 2.0 is a major upgrade from ASP.NET 1.*x* and includes numerous new bells and whistles.

Chapter 23: ASP.NET 2.0 Web Pages and Web Controls

This chapter begins your study of web technologies supported under the .NET platform using ASP.NET. As you will see, server-side scripting code is now replaced with "real" object-oriented languages (such as C#, VB .NET, and the like). This chapter will introduce you to key ASP.NET topics such as working with (or without) code-behind files, the role of ASP.NET web controls, validations controls, and interacting with the new "master page" model provided by ASP.NET 2.0.

Chapter 24: ASP.NET 2.0 Web Applications

This chapter extends your current understanding of ASP.NET by examining various ways to handle state management under .NET. Like classic ASP, ASP.NET allows you to easily create cookies, as well as application-level and session-level variables. However, ASP.NET also introduces a new state management technique: the application cache. Once you have looked at the numerous ways to handle state with ASP.NET, you will then come to learn the role of the `System.HttpApplication` base class (lurking within the `Global.asax` file) and how to dynamically alter the runtime behavior of your web application using the `Web.config` file.

Chapter 25: Understanding XML Web Services

In this final chapter of this book, you will examine the role of .NET XML web services. Simply put, a *web service* is an assembly that is activated using standard HTTP requests. The beauty of this approach is the fact that HTTP is the one wire protocol almost universal in its acceptance, and it is

therefore an excellent choice for building platform- and language-neutral distributed systems. You will also check out numerous surrounding technologies (WSDL, SOAP, and UDDI) that enable a web service and external client to communicate in harmony.

Obtaining This Book's Source Code

All of the code examples contained within this book (minus small code snippets here and there) are available for free and immediate download from the Source Code area of the Apress website. Simply navigate to `http://www.apress.com`, select the Source Code link, and look up this title by name. Once you are on the "homepage" for *Pro C# 2005 and the .NET 2.0 Platform, Third Edition*, you may download a self-extracting `*.zip` file. After you unzip the contents, you will find that the code has been logically divided by chapter.

Do be aware that Source Code notes like the following in the chapters are your cue that the example under discussion may be loaded into Visual Studio 2005 for further examination and modification:

Source Code This is a source code note referring you to a specific directory!

To do so, simply open the `*.sln` file found in the correct subdirectory.

Obtaining Updates for This Book

As you read through this text, you may find an occasional grammatical or code error (although I sure hope not). If this is the case, my apologies. Being human, I am sure that a glitch or two may be present, despite my best efforts. If this is the case, you can obtain the current errata list from the Apress website (located once again on the "homepage" for this book) as well as information on how to notify me of any errors you might find.

Contacting Me

If you have any questions regarding this book's source code, are in need of clarification for a given example, or simply wish to offer your thoughts regarding the .NET platform, feel free to drop me a line at the following e-mail address (to ensure your messages don't end up in my junk mail folder, please include "C# TE" in the Subject line somewhere): `atroelsen@IntertechTraining.com`.

Please understand that I will do my best to get back to you in a timely fashion; however, like yourself, I get busy from time to time. If I don't respond within a week or two, do know I am not trying to be a jerk or don't care to talk to you. I'm just busy (or, if I'm lucky, on vacation somewhere).

So, then! Thanks for buying this text (or at least looking at it in the bookstore while you try to decide if you will buy it). I hope you enjoy reading this book and putting your newfound knowledge to good use.

Take care,
Andrew Troelsen

PART 1



Introducing C# and the .NET Platform

CHAPTER 1

The Philosophy of .NET

Every few years or so, the modern-day programmer must be willing to perform a self-inflicted knowledge transplant to stay current with the new technologies of the day. The languages (C++, Visual Basic 6.0, Java), frameworks (MFC, ATL, STL), and architectures (COM, CORBA, EJB) that were touted as the silver bullets of software development eventually become overshadowed by something better or at the very least something new. Regardless of the frustration you can feel when upgrading your internal knowledge base, it is unavoidable. The .NET platform is Microsoft's current offering within the landscape of software engineering.

The point of this chapter is to lay the conceptual groundwork for the remainder of the book. It begins with a high-level discussion of a number of .NET-related topics such as assemblies, the common intermediate language (CIL), and just-in-time (JIT) compilation. In addition to previewing some key features of the C# programming language, you will also come to understand the relationship between various aspects of the .NET Framework, such as the common language runtime (CLR), the Common Type System (CTS), and the Common Language Specification (CLS). As you would hope, all of these topics are explored in further detail throughout the remainder of this text.

This chapter also provides you with an overview of the functionality supplied by the .NET base class libraries, sometimes abbreviated as the "BCL" or alternatively as the "FCL" (being the Framework class libraries). Finally, this chapter investigates the language-agnostic and platform-independent nature of the .NET platform (yes it's true, .NET is not confined to the Windows operating system).

Understanding the Previous State of Affairs

Before examining the specifics of the .NET universe, it's helpful to consider some of the issues that motivated the genesis of Microsoft's current platform. To get in the proper mind-set, let's begin this chapter with a brief and painless history lesson to remember our roots and understand the limitations of the previous state of affairs (after all, admitting you have a problem is the first step toward finding a solution). After completing this quick tour of life as we knew it, we turn our attention to the numerous benefits provided by C# and the .NET platform.

Life As a C/Win32 API Programmer

Traditionally speaking, developing software for the Windows family of operating systems involved using the C programming language in conjunction with the Windows application programming interface (API). While it is true that numerous applications have been successfully created using this time-honored approach, few of us would disagree that building applications using the raw API is a complex undertaking.

The first obvious problem is that C is a very terse language. C developers are forced to contend with manual memory management, ugly pointer arithmetic, and ugly syntactical constructs. Furthermore, given that C is a structured language, it lacks the benefits provided by the object-oriented

approach (can anyone say *spaghetti code*?) When you combine the thousands of global functions and data types defined by the Win32 API to an already formidable language, it is little wonder that there are so many buggy applications floating around today.

Life As a C++/MFC Programmer

One vast improvement over raw C/API development is the use of the C++ programming language. In many ways, C++ can be thought of as an object-oriented *layer* on top of C. Thus, even though C++ programmers benefit from the famed "pillars of OOP" (encapsulation, inheritance, and polymorphism), they are still at the mercy of the painful aspects of the C language (e.g., manual memory management, ugly pointer arithmetic, and ugly syntactical constructs).

Despite its complexity, many C++ frameworks exist today. For example, the Microsoft Foundation Classes (MFC) provides the developer with a set of C++ classes that facilitate the construction of Win32 applications. The main role of MFC is to wrap a "sane subset" of the raw Win32 API behind a number of classes, magic macros, and numerous code-generation tools (aka *wizards*). Regardless of the helpful assistance offered by the MFC framework (as well as many other C++-based windowing toolkits), the fact of the matter is that C++ programming remains a difficult and error-prone experience, given its historical roots in C.

Life As a Visual Basic 6.0 Programmer

Due to a heartfelt desire to enjoy a simpler lifestyle, many programmers have shifted away from the world of C(++)-based frameworks to kinder, gentler languages such as Visual Basic 6.0 (VB6). VB6 is popular due to its ability to build complex user interfaces, code libraries (e.g., COM servers), and data access logic with minimal fuss and bother. Even more than MFC, VB6 hides the complexities of the raw Win32 API from view using a number of integrated code wizards, intrinsic data types, classes, and VB-specific functions.

The major downfall of VB6 (which has been rectified given the advent of Visual Basic .NET) is that it is not a fully object-oriented language; rather, it is "object aware." For example, VB6 does not allow the programmer to establish "is-a" relationships between types (i.e., no classical inheritance) and has no intrinsic support for parameterized class construction. Moreover, VB6 doesn't provide the ability to build multithreaded applications unless you are willing to drop down to low-level Win32 API calls (which is complex at best and dangerous at worst).

Life As a Java/J2EE Programmer

Enter Java. The Java programming language is (almost) completely object oriented and has its syntactic roots in C++. As many of you are aware, Java's strengths are far greater than its support for platform independence. Java (as a language) cleans up many unsavory syntactical aspects of C++. Java (as a platform) provides programmers with a large number of predefined "packages" that contain various type definitions. Using these types, Java programmers are able to build "100% Pure Java" applications complete with database connectivity, messaging support, web-enabled front ends, and a rich user interface.

Although Java is a very elegant language, one potential problem is that using Java typically means that you must use Java front-to-back during the development cycle. In effect, Java offers little hope of language integration, as this goes against the grain of Java's primary goal (a single programming language for every need). In reality, however, there are millions of lines of existing code out there in the world that would ideally like to commingle with newer Java code. Sadly, Java makes this task problematic.

Pure Java is simply not appropriate for many graphically or numerically intensive applications (in these cases, you may find Java's execution speed leaves something to be desired). A better

approach for such programs would be to use a lower-level language (such as C++) where appropriate. Alas, while Java does provide a limited ability to access non-Java APIs, there is little support for true cross-language integration.

Life As a COM Programmer

The Component Object Model (COM) was Microsoft's previous application development framework. COM is an architecture that says in effect, "If you build your classes in accordance with the rules of COM, you end up with a block of *reusable binary code.*"

The beauty of a binary COM server is that it can be accessed in a language-independent manner. Thus, C++ programmers can build COM classes that can be used by VB6. Delphi programmers can use COM classes built using C, and so forth. However, as you may be aware, COM's language independence is somewhat limited. For example, there is no way to derive a new COM class using an existing COM class (as COM has no support for classical inheritance). Rather, you must make use of the more cumbersome "has-a" relationship to reuse COM class types.

Another benefit of COM is its location-transparent nature. Using constructs such as application identifiers (AppIDs), stubs, proxies, and the COM runtime environment, programmers can avoid the need to work with raw sockets, RPC calls, and other low-level details. For example, consider the following VB6 COM client code:

```
' This block of VB6 code can activate a COM class written in
' any COM-aware language, which may be located anywhere
' on the network (including your local machine).
Dim c as MyCOMClass
Set c = New MyCOMClass    ' Location resolved using AppID.
c.DoSomeWork
```

Although COM can be considered a very successful object model, it is extremely complex under the hood (at least until you have spent many months exploring its plumbing—especially if you happen to be a C++ programmer). To help simplify the development of COM binaries, numerous COM-aware frameworks have come into existence. For example, the Active Template Library (ATL) provides another set of C++ classes, templates, and macros to ease the creation of COM types.

Many other languages also hide a good part of the COM infrastructure from view. However, language support alone is not enough to hide the complexity of COM. Even when you choose a relatively simply COM-aware language such as VB6, you are still forced to contend with fragile registration entries and numerous deployment-related issues (collectively termed *DLL hell*).

Life As a Windows DNA Programmer

To further complicate matters, there is a little thing called the Internet. Over the last several years, Microsoft has been adding more Internet-aware features into its family of operating systems and products. Sadly, building a web application using COM-based Windows Distributed interNet Applications Architecture (DNA) is also quite complex.

Some of this complexity is due to the simple fact that Windows DNA requires the use of numerous technologies and languages (ASP, HTML, XML, JavaScript, VBScript, and COM(+), as well as a data access API such as ADO). One problem is that many of these technologies are completely unrelated from a syntactic point of view. For example, JavaScript has a syntax much like C, while VBScript is a subset of VB6. The COM servers that are created to run under the COM+ runtime have an entirely different look and feel from the ASP pages that invoke them. The result is a highly confused mishmash of technologies.

Furthermore, and perhaps more important, each language and/or technology has its own type system (that may look nothing like another's type system). An "int" in JavaScript is not quite the same as an "Integer" in VB6.

The .NET Solution

So much for the brief history lesson. The bottom line is that life as a Windows programmer has been tough. The .NET Framework is a rather radical and brute-force approach to making our lives easier. The solution proposed by .NET is "Change everything" (sorry, you can't blame the messenger for the message). As you will see during the remainder of this book, the .NET Framework is a completely new model for building systems on the Windows family of operating systems, as well as on numerous non-Microsoft operating systems such as Mac OS X and various Unix/Linux distributions. To set the stage, here is a quick rundown of some core features provided courtesy of .NET:

- *Full interoperability with existing code*: This is (of course) a good thing. Existing COM binaries can commingle (i.e., interop) with newer .NET binaries and vice versa. Also, Platform Invocation Services (PInvoke) allows you to call C-based libraries (including the underlying API of the operating system) from .NET code.
- *Complete and total language integration*: Unlike COM, .NET supports cross-language inheritance, cross-language exception handling, and cross-language debugging.
- *A common runtime engine shared by all .NET-aware languages*: One aspect of this engine is a well-defined set of types that each .NET-aware language "understands."
- *A base class library*: This library provides shelter from the complexities of raw API calls and offers a consistent object model used by all .NET-aware languages.
- *No more COM plumbing*: `IClassFactory`, `IUnknown`, `IDispatch`, IDL code, and the evil `VARIANT`-compliant data types (`BSTR`, `SAFEARRAY`, and so forth) have no place in a native .NET binary.
- *A truly simplified deployment model*: Under .NET, there is no need to register a binary unit into the system registry. Furthermore, .NET allows multiple versions of the same `*.dll` to exist in harmony on a single machine.

As you can most likely gather from the previous bullet points, the .NET platform has nothing to do with COM (beyond the fact that both frameworks originated from Microsoft). In fact, the only way .NET and COM types can interact with each other is using the interoperability layer.

■ **Note** Coverage of the .NET interoperability layer (including PInvoke) is beyond the scope of this book. If you require a detailed treatment of these topics, check out my book *COM and .NET Interoperability* (Apress, 2002).

Introducing the Building Blocks of the .NET Platform (the CLR, CTS, and CLS)

Now that you know some of the benefits provided by .NET, let's preview three key (and interrelated) entities that make it all possible: the CLR, CTS, and CLS. From a programmer's point of view, .NET can be understood as a new runtime environment and a comprehensive base class library. The runtime layer is properly referred to as the *common language runtime*, or *CLR*. The primary role of the CLR is to locate, load, and manage .NET types on your behalf. The CLR also takes care of a number of low-level details such as memory management and performing security checks.

Another building block of the .NET platform is the *Common Type System*, or *CTS*. The CTS specification fully describes all possible data types and programming constructs supported by the runtime, specifies how these entities can interact with each other, and details how they are represented in the .NET metadata format (more information on metadata later in this chapter).

Understand that a given .NET-aware language might not support each and every feature defined by the CTS. The *Common Language Specification* (*CLS*) is a related specification that defines a subset of common types and programming constructs that all .NET programming languages can agree on. Thus, if you build .NET types that only expose CLS-compliant features, you can rest assured that all .NET-aware languages can consume them. Conversely, if you make use of a data type or programming construct that is outside of the bounds of the CLS, you cannot guarantee that every .NET programming language can interact with your .NET code library.

The Role of the Base Class Libraries

In addition to the CLR and CTS/CLS specifications, the .NET platform provides a base class library that is available to all .NET programming languages. Not only does this base class library encapsulate various primitives such as threads, file input/output (I/O), graphical rendering, and interaction with various external hardware devices, but it also provides support for a number of services required by most real-world applications.

For example, the base class libraries define types that facilitate database access, XML manipulation, programmatic security, and the construction of web-enabled (as well as traditional desktop and console-based) front ends. From a high level, you can visualize the relationship between the CLR, CTS, CLS, and the base class library, as shown in Figure 1-1.

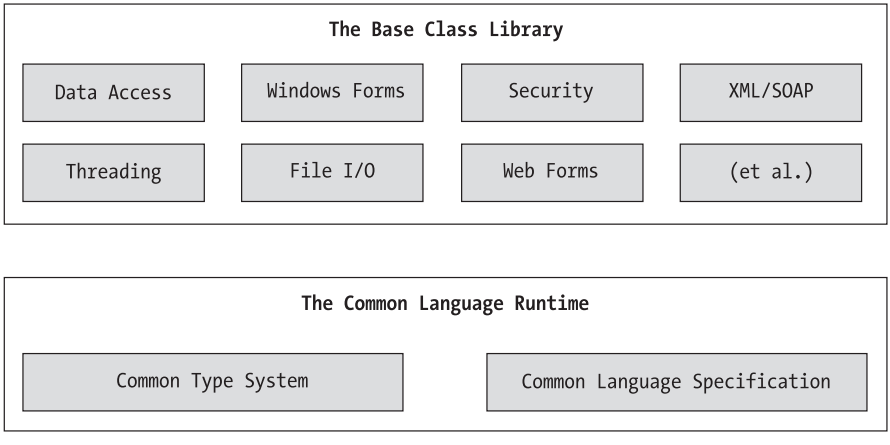


Figure 1-1. *The CLR, CTS, CLS, and base class library relationship*

What C# Brings to the Table

Given that .NET is such a radical departure from previous technologies, Microsoft has developed a new programming language, C# (pronounced "see sharp"), specifically for this new platform. C# is a programming language that looks *very* similar (but not identical) to the syntax of Java. However, to call C# a Java rip-off is inaccurate. Both C# and Java are based on the syntactical constructs of C++. Just as Java is in many ways a cleaned-up version of C++, C# can be viewed as a cleaned-up version of Java—after all, they are all in the same family of languages.

The truth of the matter is that many of C#'s syntactic constructs are modeled after various aspects of Visual Basic 6.0 and C++. For example, like VB6, C# supports the notion of formal type properties (as opposed to traditional getter and setter methods) and the ability to declare methods taking varying number of arguments (via parameter arrays). Like C++, C# allows you to overload operators, as well as to create structures, enumerations, and callback functions (via delegates).

Due to the fact that C# is a hybrid of numerous languages, the result is a product that is as syntactically clean—if not cleaner—than Java, is about as simple as VB6, and provides just about as much power and flexibility as C++ (without the associated ugly bits). In a nutshell, the C# language offers the following features (many of which are shared by other .NET-aware programming languages):

- No pointers required! C# programs typically have no need for direct pointer manipulation (although you are free to drop down to that level if absolutely necessary).
- Automatic memory management through garbage collection. Given this, C# does not support a `delete` keyword.
- Formal syntactic constructs for enumerations, structures, and class properties.
- The C++-like ability to overload operators for a custom type, without the complexity (e.g., making sure to "return *this to allow chaining" is not your problem).
- As of C# 2005, the ability to build generic types and generic members using a syntax very similar to C++ templates.
- Full support for interface-based programming techniques.
- Full support for aspect-oriented programming (AOP) techniques via attributes. This brand of development allows you to assign characteristics to types and their members to further qualify their behavior.

Perhaps the most important point to understand about the C# language shipped with the Microsoft .NET platform is that it can only produce code that can execute within the .NET runtime (you could never use C# to build a native COM server or a unmanaged Win32 API application). Officially speaking, the term used to describe the code targeting the .NET runtime is *managed code*. The binary unit that contains the managed code is termed an *assembly* (more details on assemblies in just a bit). Conversely, code that cannot be directly hosted by the .NET runtime is termed *unmanaged code*.

Additional .NET-Aware Programming Languages

Understand that C# is not the only language targeting the .NET platform. When the .NET platform was first revealed to the general public during the 2000 Microsoft Professional Developers Conference (PDC), several vendors announced they were busy building .NET-aware versions of their respective compilers. At the time of this writing, dozens of different languages have undergone .NET enlightenment. In addition to the five languages that ship with Visual Studio 2005 (C#, J#, Visual Basic .NET, Managed Extensions for C++, and JScript .NET), there are .NET compilers for Smalltalk, COBOL, and Pascal (to name a few).

Although this book focuses (almost) exclusively on C#, Table 1-1 lists a number of .NET-enabled programming languages and where to learn more about them (do note that these URLs are subject to change).

Table 1-1. *A Sampling of .NET-Aware Programming Languages*

.NET Language Web Link	Meaning in Life
`http://www.oberon.ethz.ch/oberon.net`	Homepage for Active Oberon .NET.
`http://www.usafa.af.mil/df/dfcs/bios/mcc_html/a_sharp.cfm`	Homepage for A# (a port of Ada to the .NET platform).
`http://www.netcobol.com`	For those interested in COBOL .NET.
`http://www.eiffel.com`	For those interested in Eiffel .NET.
`http://www.dataman.ro/dforth`	For those interested in Forth .NET.
`http://www.silverfrost.com/11/ftn95/ftn95_fortran_95_for_windows.asp`	For those interested in Fortran .NET.
`http://www.vmx-net.com`	Yes, even Smalltalk .NET is available.

Please be aware that Table 1-1 is not exhaustive. Numerous websites maintain a list of .NET-aware compilers, one of which would be `http://www.dotnetpowered.com/languages.aspx` (again, the exact URL is subject to change). I encourage you to visit this page, as you are sure to find many .NET languages worth investigating (LISP .NET, anyone?).

Life in a Multilanguage World

As developers first come to understand the language-agnostic nature of .NET, numerous questions arise. The most prevalent of these questions would have to be, "If all .NET languages compile down to 'managed code,' why do we need more than one compiler?" There are a number of ways to answer this question. First, we programmers are a *very* particular lot when it comes to our choice of programming language (myself included). Some of us prefer languages full of semicolons and curly brackets, with as few language keywords as possible. Others enjoy a language that offers more "human-readable" syntactic tokens (such as Visual Basic .NET). Still others may want to leverage their mainframe skills while moving to the .NET platform (via COBOL .NET).

Now, be honest. If Microsoft were to build a single "official" .NET language that was derived from the BASIC family of languages, can you really say all programmers would be happy with this choice? Or, if the only "official" .NET language was based on Fortran syntax, imagine all the folks out there who would ignore .NET altogether. Because the .NET runtime couldn't care less which language was used to build a block of managed code, .NET programmers can stay true to their syntactic preferences, and share the compiled assemblies among teammates, departments, and external organizations (regardless of which .NET language others choose to use).

Another excellent byproduct of integrating various .NET languages into a single unified software solution is the simple fact that all programming languages have their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. For example, some programming languages offer excellent intrinsic support for advanced mathematical processing. Others offer superior support for financial calculations, logical calculations, interaction with mainframe computers, and so forth. When you take the strengths of a particular programming language and then incorporate the benefits provided by the .NET platform, everybody wins.

Of course, in reality the chances are quite good that you will spend much of your time building software using your .NET language of choice. However, once you learn the syntax of one .NET language, it is very easy to master another. This is also quite beneficial, especially to the consultants of the world. If your language of choice happens to be C#, but you are placed at a client site that has committed to Visual Basic .NET, you should be able to parse the existing code body almost instantly (honest!) while still continuing to leverage the .NET Framework. Enough said.

An Overview of .NET Assemblies

Regardless of which .NET language you choose to program with, understand that despite the fact that .NET binaries take the same file extension as COM servers and unmanaged Win32 binaries (`*.dll` or `*.exe`), they have absolutely no internal similarities. For example, `*.dll` .NET binaries do not export methods to facilitate communications with the COM runtime (given that .NET is *not* COM). Furthermore, .NET binaries are not described using COM type libraries and are not registered into the system registry. Perhaps most important, .NET binaries do not contain platform-specific instructions, but rather platform-agnostic *intermediate language* (*IL*) and type metadata. Figure 1-2 shows the big picture of the story thus far.

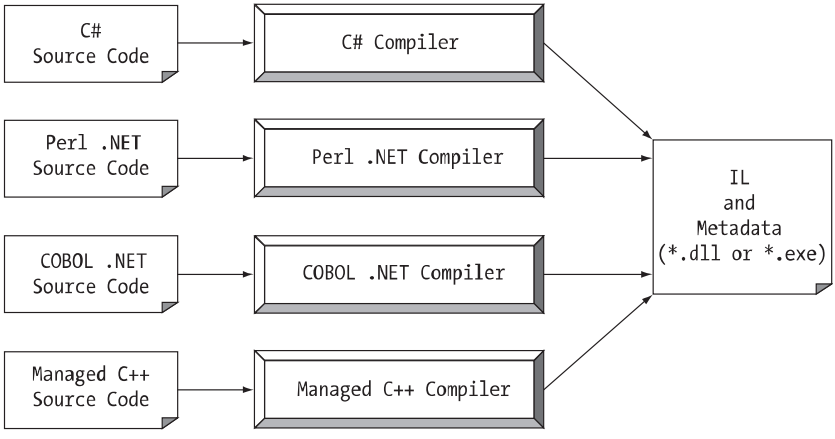


Figure 1-2. *All .NET-aware compilers emit IL instructions and metadata.*

■ **Note** There is one point to be made regarding the abbreviation "IL." During the development of .NET, the official term for IL was Microsoft intermediate language (MSIL). However with the final release of .NET, the term was changed to common intermediate language (CIL). Thus, as you read the .NET literature, understand that IL, MSIL, and CIL are all describing the same exact entity. In keeping with the current terminology, I will use the abbreviation "CIL" throughout this text.

When a `*.dll` or `*.exe` has been created using a .NET-aware compiler, the resulting module is bundled into an *assembly*. You will examine numerous details of .NET assemblies in Chapter 11. However, to facilitate the discussion of the .NET runtime environment, you do need to understand some basic properties of this new file format.

As mentioned, an assembly contains CIL code, which is conceptually similar to Java bytecode in that it is not compiled to platform-specific instructions until absolutely necessary. Typically, "absolutely necessary" is the point at which a block of CIL instructions (such as a method implementation) is referenced for use by the .NET runtime.

In addition to CIL instructions, assemblies also contain *metadata* that describes in vivid detail the characteristics of every "type" living within the binary. For example, if you have a class named `SportsCar`, the type metadata describes details such as `SportsCar`'s base class, which interfaces are

implemented by `SportsCar` (if any), as well as a full description of each member supported by the `SportsCar` type.

.NET metadata is a dramatic improvement to COM type metadata. As you may already know, COM binaries are typically described using an associated type library (which is little more than a binary version of Interface Definition Language [IDL] code). The problems with COM type information are that it is not guaranteed to be present and the fact that IDL code has no way to document the externally referenced servers that are required for the correct operation of the current COM server. In contrast, .NET metadata is always present and is automatically generated by a given .NET-aware compiler.

Finally, in addition to CIL and type metadata, assemblies themselves are also described using metadata, which is officially termed a *manifest*. The manifest contains information about the current version of the assembly, culture information (used for localizing string and image resources), and a list of all externally referenced assemblies that are required for proper execution. You'll examine various tools that can be used to examine an assembly's types, metadata, and manifest information over the course of the next few chapters.

Single-File and Multifile Assemblies

In a great number of cases, there is a simple one-to-one correspondence between a .NET assembly and the binary file (`*.dll` or `*.exe`). Thus, if you are building a .NET `*.dll`, it is safe to consider that the binary and the assembly are one and the same. Likewise, if you are building an executable desktop application, the `*.exe` can simply be referred to as the assembly itself. As you'll see in Chapter 11, however, this is not completely accurate. Technically speaking, if an assembly is composed of a single `*.dll` or `*.exe` module, you have a *single-file assembly*. Single-file assemblies contain all the necessary CIL, metadata, and associated manifest in an autonomous, single, well-defined package.

Multifile assemblies, on the other hand, are composed of numerous .NET binaries, each of which is termed a *module*. When building a multifile assembly, one of these modules (termed the *primary module*) must contain the assembly manifest (and possibly CIL instructions and metadata for various types). The other related modules contain a module level manifest, CIL, and type metadata. As you might suspect, the primary module documents the set of required secondary modules within the assembly manifest.

So, why would you choose to create a multifile assembly? When you partition an assembly into discrete modules, you end up with a more flexible deployment option. For example, if a user is referencing a remote assembly that needs to be downloaded onto his or her machine, the runtime will only download the required modules. Therefore, you are free to construct your assembly in such a way that less frequently required types (such as a type named `HardDriveReformatter`) are kept in a separate stand-alone module.

In contrast, if all your types were placed in a single-file assembly, the end user may end up downloading a large chunk of data that is not really needed (which is obviously a waste of time). Thus, as you can see, an assembly is really a *logical grouping* of one or more related modules that are intended to be initially deployed and versioned as a single unit.

The Role of the Common Intermediate Language

Now that you have a better feel for .NET assemblies, let's examine the role of the common intermediate language (CIL) in a bit more detail. CIL is a language that sits above any particular platform-specific instruction set. Regardless of which .NET-aware language you choose, the associated compiler emits CIL instructions. For example, the following C# code models a trivial calculator. Don't concern yourself with the exact syntax for now, but do notice the format of the `Add()` method in the `Calc` class:

```
// Calc.cs
using System;

namespace CalculatorExample
{
    // This class contains the app's entry point.
    public class CalcApp
    {
        static void Main()
        {
            Calc c = new Calc();
            int ans = c.Add(10, 84);
            Console.WriteLine("10 + 84 is {0}.", ans);

            // Wait for user to press the Enter key before shutting down.
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }

    // The C# calculator.
    public class Calc
    {
        public int Add(int x, int y)
        { return x + y; }
    }
}
```

Once the C# compiler (`csc.exe`) compiles this source code file, you end up with a single-file `*.exe` assembly that contains a manifest, CIL instructions, and metadata describing each aspect of the `Calc` and `CalcApp` classes. For example, if you were to open this assembly using `ildasm.exe` (examined a little later in this chapter), you would find that the `Add()` method is represented using CIL such as the following:

```
.method public hidebysig instance int32  Add(int32 x, int32 y) cil managed
{
  // Code size       8 (0x8)
  .maxstack  2
  .locals init ([0] int32 CS$1$0000)
  IL_0000:  ldarg.1
  IL_0001:  ldarg.2
  IL_0002:  add
  IL_0003:  stloc.0
  IL_0004:  br.s       IL_0006
  IL_0006:  ldloc.0
  IL_0007:  ret
} // end of method Calc::Add
```

Don't worry if you are unable to make heads or tails of the resulting CIL for this method—Chapter 15 will describe the basics of the CIL programming language. The point to concentrate on is that the C# compiler emits CIL, not platform-specific instructions.

Now, recall that this is true of all .NET-aware compilers. To illustrate, assume you created this same application using Visual Basic .NET (VB .NET), rather than C#:

```
' Calc.vb
Imports System

Namespace CalculatorExample
    ' A VB .NET 'Module' is a class that only contains
    ' static members.
    Module CalcApp
        Sub Main()
            Dim ans As Integer
            Dim c As New Calc
            ans = c.Add(10, 84)
            Console.WriteLine("10 + 84 is {0}.", ans)
            Console.ReadLine()
        End Sub
    End Module

    Class Calc
        Public Function Add(ByVal x As Integer, ByVal y As Integer) As Integer
            Return x + y
        End Function
    End Class
End Namespace
```

If you examine the CIL for the `Add()` method, you find similar instructions (slightly tweaked by the VB .NET compiler):

```
.method public instance int32  Add(int32 x, int32 y) cil managed
{
  // Code size       9 (0x9)
  .maxstack  2
  .locals init ([0] int32 Add)
  IL_0000:  nop
  IL_0001:  ldarg.1
  IL_0002:  ldarg.2
  IL_0003:  add.ovf
  IL_0004:  stloc.0
  IL_0005:  br.s       IL_0007
  IL_0007:  ldloc.0
  IL_0008:  ret
} // end of method Calc::Add
```

Benefits of CIL

At this point, you might be wondering exactly what is gained by compiling source code into CIL rather than directly to a specific instruction set. One benefit is language integration. As you have already seen, each .NET-aware compiler produces nearly identical CIL instructions. Therefore, all languages are able to interact within a well-defined binary arena.

Furthermore, given that CIL is platform-agnostic, the .NET Framework itself is platform-agnostic, providing the same benefits Java developers have grown accustomed to (i.e., a single code base running on numerous operating systems). In fact, there is an international standard for the C# language, and a large subset of the .NET platform and implementations already exist for many non-Windows operating systems (more details at the conclusion of this chapter). In contrast to Java, however, .NET allows you to build applications using your language of choice.

Compiling CIL to Platform-Specific Instructions

Due to the fact that assemblies contain CIL instructions, rather than platform-specific instructions, CIL code must be compiled on the fly before use. The entity that compiles CIL code into meaningful CPU instructions is termed a *just-in-time* (*JIT*) *compiler*, which sometimes goes by the friendly name of *Jitter*. The .NET runtime environment leverages a JIT compiler for each CPU targeting the runtime, each optimized for the underlying platform.

For example, if you are building a .NET application that is to be deployed to a handheld device (such as a Pocket PC), the corresponding Jitter is well equipped to run within a low-memory environment. On the other hand, if you are deploying your assembly to a back-end server (where memory is seldom an issue), the Jitter will be optimized to function in a high-memory environment. In this way, developers can write a single body of code that can be efficiently JIT-compiled and executed on machines with different architectures.

Furthermore, as a given Jitter compiles CIL instructions into corresponding machine code, it will cache the results in memory in a manner suited to the target operating system. In this way, if a call is made to a method named `PrintDocument()`, the CIL instructions are compiled into platform-specific instructions on the first invocation and retained in memory for later use. Therefore, the next time `PrintDocument()` is called, there is no need to recompile the CIL.

The Role of .NET Type Metadata

In addition to CIL instructions, a .NET assembly contains full, complete, and accurate metadata, which describes each and every type (class, structure, enumeration, and so forth) defined in the binary, as well as the members of each type (properties, methods, events, and so on). Thankfully, it is always the job of the compiler (not the programmer) to emit the latest and greatest type metadata. Because .NET metadata is so wickedly meticulous, assemblies are completely self-describing entities—so much so, in fact, that .NET binaries have no need to be registered into the system registry.

To illustrate the format of .NET type metadata, let's take a look at the metadata that has been generated for the `Add()` method of the C# `Calc` class you examined previously (the metadata generated for the VB .NET version of the `Add()` method is similar):

```
TypeDef #2 (02000003)
-------------------------------------------------------
  TypDefName: CalculatorExample.Calc  (02000003)
  Flags     : [Public] [AutoLayout] [Class]
  [AnsiClass] [BeforeFieldInit]  (00100001)
  Extends   : 01000001 [TypeRef] System.Object
  Method #1 (06000003)
-------------------------------------------------------
  MethodName: Add (06000003)
  Flags     : [Public] [HideBySig] [ReuseSlot]  (00000086)
  RVA       : 0x00002090
  ImplFlags : [IL] [Managed]  (00000000)
  CallCnvntn: [DEFAULT]
  hasThis
  ReturnType: I4
    2 Arguments
    Argument #1:  I4
    Argument #2:  I4
    2 Parameters
    (1) ParamToken : (08000001) Name : x flags: [none] (00000000)
    (2) ParamToken : (08000002) Name : y flags: [none] (00000000)
```

Metadata is used by numerous aspects of the .NET runtime environment, as well as by various development tools. For example, the IntelliSense feature provided by Visual Studio 2005 is made possible by reading an assembly's metadata at design time. Metadata is also used by various object browsing utilities, debugging tools, and the C# compiler itself. To be sure, metadata is the backbone of numerous .NET technologies including remoting, reflection, late binding, XML web services, and object serialization.

The Role of the Assembly Manifest

Last but not least, remember that a .NET assembly also contains metadata that describes the assembly itself (technically termed a *manifest*). Among other details, the manifest documents all external assemblies required by the current assembly to function correctly, the assembly's version number, copyright information, and so forth. Like type metadata, it is always the job of the compiler to generate the assembly's manifest. Here are some relevant details of the `CSharpCalculator.exe` manifest:

```
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
.assembly CSharpCalculator
{
  .hash algorithm 0x00008004
  .ver 0:0:0:0
}
.module CSharpCalculator.exe
.imagebase 0x00400000
.subsystem 0x00000003
.file alignment 512
.corflags 0x00000001
```

In a nutshell, this manifest documents the list of external assemblies required by `CSharpCalculator.exe` (via the `.assembly extern` directive) as well as various characteristics of the assembly itself (version number, module name, and so on).

Understanding the Common Type System

A given assembly may contain any number of distinct "types." In the world of .NET, "type" is simply a generic term used to refer to a member from the set {class, structure, interface, enumeration, delegate}. When you build solutions using a .NET-aware language, you will most likely interact with each of these types. For example, your assembly may define a single class that implements some number of interfaces. Perhaps one of the interface methods takes an enumeration type as an input parameter and returns a structure to the caller.

Recall that the Common Type System (CTS) is a formal specification that documents how types must be defined in order to be hosted by the CLR. Typically, the only individuals who are deeply concerned with the inner workings of the CTS are those building tools and/or compilers that target the .NET platform. It is important, however, for all .NET programmers to learn about how to work with the five types defined by the CTS in their language of choice. Here is a brief overview.

CTS Class Types

Every .NET-aware language supports, at the very least, the notion of a *class type*, which is the cornerstone of object-oriented programming (OOP). A class may be composed of any number of members (such as properties, methods, and events) and data points (fields). In C#, classes are declared using the `class` keyword:

```
// A C# class type.
public class Calc
{
     public int Add(int x, int y)
     { return x + y; }
}
```

Chapter 4 examines the process of building CTS class types with C#; however, Table 1-2 documents a number of characteristics pertaining to class types.

Table 1-2. *CTS Class Characteristics*

Class Characteristic	Meaning in Life
Is the class "sealed" or not?	Sealed classes cannot function as a base class to other classes.
Does the class implement any interfaces?	An *interface* is a collection of abstract members that provide a contract between the object and object user. The CTS allows a class to implement any number of interfaces.
Is the class abstract or concrete?	*Abstract* classes cannot be directly created, but are intended to define common behaviors for derived types. *Concrete* classes can be created directly.
What is the "visibility" of this class?	Each class must be configured with a visibility attribute. Basically, this trait defines if the class may be used by external assemblies, or only from within the defining assembly (e.g., a private helper class).

CTS Structure Types

The concept of a structure is also formalized under the CTS. If you have a C background, you should be pleased to know that these user-defined types (UDTs) have survived in the world of .NET (although they behave a bit differently under the hood). Simply put, a *structure* can be thought of as a lightweight class type having value-based semantics. For more details on the subtleties of structures, see Chapter 3. Typically, structures are best suited for modeling geometric and mathematical data, and are created in C# using the `struct` keyword:

```
// A C# structure type.
struct Point
{
     // Structures can contain fields.
     public int xPos, yPos;

     // Structures can contain parameterized constructors.
     public Point(int x, int y)
     {  xPos = x; yPos = y;}

     // Structures may define methods.
     public void Display()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("({0}, {1}", xPos, yPos);
     }
}
```

CTS Interface Types

Interfaces are nothing more than a named collection of abstract member definitions, which may be supported (i.e., implemented) by a given class or structure. Unlike COM, .NET interfaces do *not* derive a common base interface such as `IUnknown`. In C#, interface types are defined using the `interface` keyword, for example:

```
// A C# interface type.
public interface IDraw
{
     void Draw();
}
```

On their own, interfaces are of little use. However, when a class or structure implements a given interface in its unique way, you are able to request access to the supplied functionality using an interface reference in a polymorphic manner. Interface-based programming will be fully explored in Chapter 7.

CTS Enumeration Types

Enumerations are a handy programming construct that allows you to group name/value pairs. For example, assume you are creating a video-game application that allows the player to select one of three character categories (Wizard, Fighter, or Thief). Rather than keeping track of raw numerical values to represent each possibility, you could build a custom enumeration using the `enum` keyword:

```
// A C# enumeration type.
public enum CharacterType
{
    Wizard = 100,
    Fighter = 200,
    Thief = 300
}
```

By default, the storage used to hold each item is a 32-bit integer; however, it is possible to alter this storage slot if need be (e.g., when programming for a low-memory device such as a Pocket PC). Also, the CTS demands that enumerated types derive from a common base class, `System.Enum`. As you will see in Chapter 3, this base class defines a number of interesting members that allow you to extract, manipulate, and transform the underlying name/value pairs programmatically.

CTS Delegate Types

Delegates are the .NET equivalent of a type-safe C-style function pointer. The key difference is that a .NET delegate is a *class* that derives from `System.MulticastDelegate`, rather than a simple pointer to a raw memory address. In C#, delegates are declared using the `delegate` keyword:

```
// This C# delegate type can 'point to' any method
// returning an integer and taking two integers as input.
public delegate int BinaryOp(int x, int y);
```

Delegates are useful when you wish to provide a way for one entity to forward a call to another entity, and provide the foundation for the .NET event architecture. As you will see in Chapters 8 and 14, delegates have intrinsic support for multicasting (i.e., forwarding a request to multiple recipients) and asynchronous method invocations.

CTS Type Members

Now that you have previewed each of the types formalized by the CTS, realize that most types take any number of *members*. Formally speaking, a *type member* is constrained by the set {constructor, finalizer, static constructor, nested type, operator, method, property, indexer, field, read only field, constant, event}.

The CTS defines various "adornments" that may be associated with a given member. For example, each member has a given visibility trait (e.g., public, private, protected, and so forth). Some members may be declared as abstract to enforce a polymorphic behavior on derived types as well as virtual to define a canned (but overridable) implementation. Also, most members may be configured as static (bound at the class level) or instance (bound at the object level). The construction of type members is examined over the course of the next several chapters.

■ **Note** As described in Chapter 10, .NET 2.0 supports the construction of generic types and generic members.

Intrinsic CTS Data Types

The final aspect of the CTS to be aware of for the time being is that it establishes a well-defined set of core data types. Although a given language typically has a unique keyword used to declare an intrinsic CTS data type, all language keywords ultimately resolve to the same type defined in an assembly named `mscorlib.dll`. Consider Table 1-3, which documents how key CTS data types are expressed in various .NET languages.

Table 1-3. *The Intrinsic CTS Data Types*

CTS Data Type	VB .NET Keyword	C# Keyword	Managed Extensions for C++ Keyword
`System.Byte`	`Byte`	`byte`	`unsigned char`
`System.SByte`	`SByte`	`sbyte`	`signed char`
`System.Int16`	`Short`	`short`	`short`
`System.Int32`	`Integer`	`int`	`int` or `long`
`System.Int64`	`Long`	`long`	`__int64`
`System.UInt16`	`UShort`	`ushort`	`unsigned short`
`System.UInt32`	`UInteger`	`uint`	`unsigned int` or `unsigned long`
`System.UInt64`	`ULong`	`ulong`	`unsigned __int64`
`System.Single`	`Single`	`float`	`Float`
`System.Double`	`Double`	`double`	`Double`
`System.Object`	`Object`	`object`	`Object^`
`System.Char`	`Char`	`char`	`wchar_t`
`System.String`	`String`	`string`	`String^`
`System.Decimal`	`Decimal`	`decimal`	`Decimal`
`System.Boolean`	`Boolean`	`bool`	`Bool`

Understanding the Common Language Specification

As you are aware, different languages express the same programming constructs in unique, language-specific terms. For example, in C# you denote string concatenation using the plus operator (+), while in VB .NET you typically make use of the ampersand (&). Even when two distinct languages express the same programmatic idiom (e.g., a function with no return value), the chances are very good that the syntax will appear quite different on the surface:

```
' VB .NET method returning nothing.
Public Sub MyMethod()
    ' Some interesting code...
End Sub

// C# method returning nothing.
public void MyMethod()
{
    // Some interesting code...
}
```

As you have already seen, these minor syntactic variations are inconsequential in the eyes of the .NET runtime, given that the respective compilers (`vbc.exe` or `csc.exe`, in this case) emit a similar set of CIL instructions. However, languages can also differ with regard to their overall level of functionality. For example, a .NET language may or may not have a keyword to represent unsigned data, and may or may not support pointer types. Given these possible variations, it would be ideal to have a baseline to which all .NET-aware languages are expected to conform.

The Common Language Specification (CLS) is a set of rules that describe in vivid detail the minimal and complete set of features a given .NET-aware compiler must support to produce code that can be hosted by the CLR, while at the same time be accessed in a uniform manner by all languages that target the .NET platform. In many ways, the CLS can be viewed as a *subset* of the full functionality defined by the CTS.

The CLS is ultimately a set of rules that compiler builders must conform to, if they intend their products to function seamlessly within the .NET universe. Each rule is assigned a simple name (e.g., "CLS Rule 6") and describes how this rule affects those who build the compilers as well as those who (in some way) interact with them. The crème de la crème of the CLS is the mighty Rule 1:

- *Rule 1*: CLS rules apply only to those parts of a type that are exposed outside the defining assembly.

Given this rule, you can (correctly) infer that the remaining rules of the CLS do not apply to the logic used to build the inner workings of a .NET type. The only aspects of a type that must conform to the CLS are the member definitions themselves (i.e., naming conventions, parameters, and return types). The implementation logic for a member may use any number of non-CLS techniques, as the outside world won't know the difference.

To illustrate, the following `Add()` method is not CLS-compliant, as the parameters and return values make use of unsigned data (which is not a requirement of the CLS):

```
public class Calc
{
    // Exposed unsigned data is not CLS compliant!
    public ulong Add(ulong x, ulong y)
    { return x + y;}
}
```

However, if you were to simply make use of unsigned data internally as follows:

```
public class Calc
{
    public int Add(int x, int y)
    {
        // As this ulong variable is only used internally,
        // we are still CLS compliant.
        ulong temp;
        ...
        return x + y;
    }
}
```

you have still conformed to the rules of the CLS, and can rest assured that all .NET languages are able to invoke the `Add()` method.

Of course, in addition to Rule 1, the CLS defines numerous other rules. For example, the CLS describes how a given language must represent text strings, how enumerations should be represented internally (the base type used for storage), how to define static members, and so forth. Luckily, you don't have to commit these rules to memory to be a proficient .NET developer. Again, by and large, an intimate understanding of the CTS and CLS specifications is only of interest to tool/compiler builders.

Ensuring CLS Compliance

As you will see over the course of this book, C# does define a number of programming constructs that are not CLS-compliant. The good news, however, is that you can instruct the C# compiler to check your code for CLS compliance using a single .NET attribute:

```
// Tell the C# compiler to check for CLS compliance.
[assembly: System.CLSCompliant(true)]
```

Chapter 12 dives into the details of attribute-based programming. Until then, simply understand that the `[CLSCompliant]` attribute will instruct the C# compiler to check each and every line of code against the rules of the CLS. If any CLS violations are discovered, you receive a compiler error and a description of the offending code.

Understanding the Common Language Runtime

In addition to the CTS and CLS specifications, the final TLA (three letter abbreviation) to contend with at the moment is the CLR. Programmatically speaking, the term *runtime* can be understood as a collection of external services that are required to execute a given compiled unit of code. For example, when developers make use of the Microsoft Foundation Classes (MFC) to create a new application, they are aware that their program requires the MFC runtime library (i.e., `mfc42.dll`). Other popular languages also have a corresponding runtime. VB6 programmers are also tied to a runtime module or two (e.g., `msvbvm60.dll`). Java developers are tied to the Java Virtual Machine (JVM) and so forth.

The .NET platform offers yet another runtime system. The key difference between the .NET runtime and the various other runtimes I just mentioned is the fact that the .NET runtime provides a single well-defined runtime layer that is shared by *all* languages and platforms that are .NET-aware.

The crux of the CLR is physically represented by a library named `mscoree.dll` (aka the Common Object Runtime Execution Engine). When an assembly is referenced for use, `mscoree.dll` is loaded automatically, which in turn loads the required assembly into memory. The runtime engine is responsible for a number of tasks. First and foremost, it is the entity in charge of resolving

the location of an assembly and finding the requested type within the binary by reading the contained metadata. The CLR then lays out the type in memory, compiles the associated CIL into platform-specific instructions, performs any necessary security checks, and then executes the code in question.

In addition to loading your custom assemblies and creating your custom types, the CLR will also interact with the types contained within the .NET base class libraries when required. Although the entire base class library has been broken into a number of discrete assemblies, the key assembly is `mscorlib.dll`. `mscorlib.dll` contains a large number of core types that encapsulate a wide variety of common programming tasks as well as the core data types used by all .NET languages. When you build .NET solutions, you automatically have access to this particular assembly.

Figure 1-3 illustrates the workflow that takes place between your source code (which is making use of base class library types), a given .NET compiler, and the .NET execution engine.

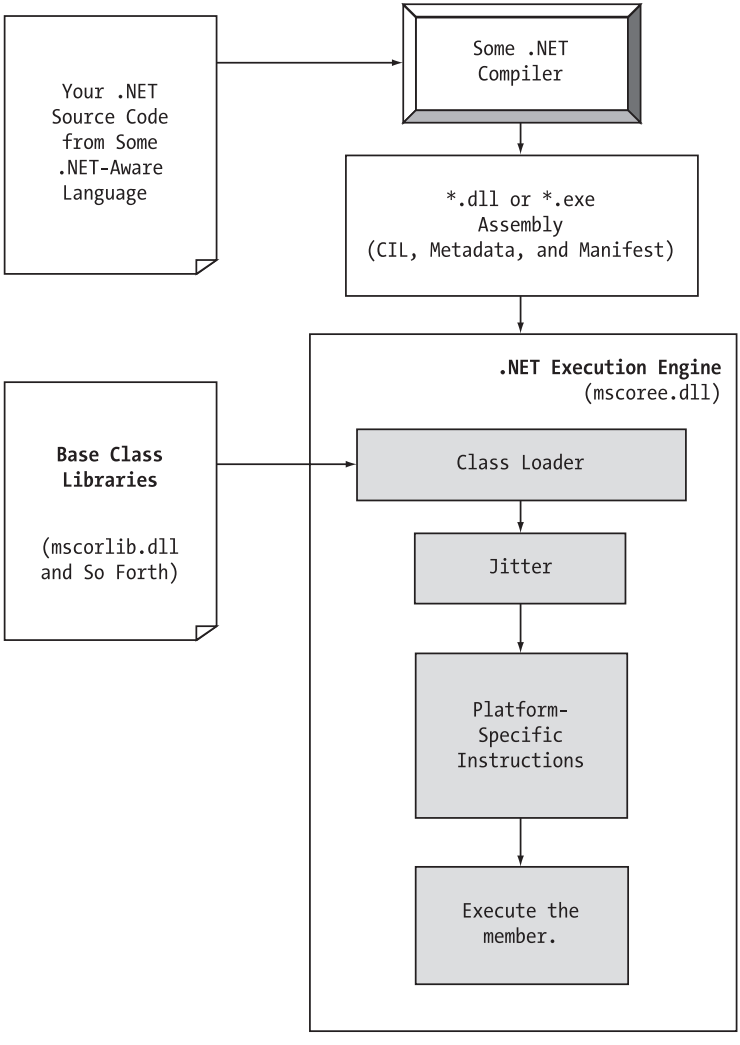


Figure 1-3. *mscoree.dll in action*

The Assembly/Namespace/Type Distinction

Each of us understands the importance of code libraries. The point of libraries such as MFC, J2EE, and ATL is to give developers a well-defined set of existing code to leverage in their applications. However, the C# language does not come with a language-specific code library. Rather, C# developers leverage the language-neutral .NET libraries. To keep all the types within the base class libraries well organized, the .NET platform makes extensive use of the *namespace* concept.

Simply put, a namespace is a grouping of related types contained in an assembly. For example, the `System.IO` namespace contains file I/O related types, the `System.Data` namespace defines basic database types, and so on. It is very important to point out that a single assembly (such as `mscorlib.dll`) can contain any number of namespaces, each of which can contain any number of types.

To clarify, Figure 1-4 shows a screen shot of the Visual Studio 2005 Object Brower utility. This tool allows you to examine the assemblies referenced by your current project, the namespaces within a particular assembly, the types within a given namespace, and the members of a specific type. Note that `mscorlib.dll` contains many different namespaces, each with its own semantically related types.

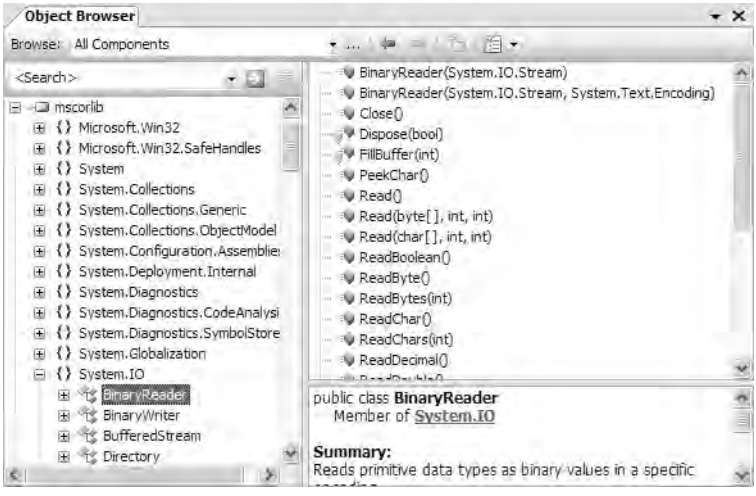


Figure 1-4. *A single assembly can have any number of namespaces.*

The key difference between this approach and a language-specific library such as MFC is that any language targeting the .NET runtime makes use of the *same* namespaces and *same* types. For example, the following three programs all illustrate the ubiquitous "Hello World" application, written in C#, VB .NET, and Managed Extensions for C++:

```
// Hello world in C#
using System;

public class MyApp
{
     static void Main()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Hi from C#");
     }
}
```

```
' Hello world in VB .NET
Imports System

Public Module MyApp
     Sub Main()
          Console.WriteLine("Hi from VB .NET")
     End Sub
End Module
```

```
// Hello world in Managed Extensions for C++
#include "stdafx.h"
using namespace System;

int main(array<System::String ^> ^args)
{
    Console::WriteLine(L"Hi from managed C++");
    return 0;
}
```

Notice that each language is making use of the `Console` class defined in the `System` namespace. Beyond minor syntactic variations, these three applications look and feel very much alike, both physically and logically.

Clearly, your primary goal as a .NET developer is to get to know the wealth of types defined in the (numerous) .NET namespaces. The most fundamental namespace to get your hands around is named `System`. This namespace provides a core body of types that you will need to leverage time and again as a .NET developer. In fact, you cannot build any sort of functional C# application without at least making a reference to the `System` namespace. Table 1-4 offers a rundown of some (but certainly not all) of the .NET namespaces.

Table 1-4. *A Sampling of .NET Namespaces*

.NET Namespace	Meaning in Life
`System`	Within `System` you find numerous useful types dealing with intrinsic data, mathematical computations, random number generation, environment variables, and garbage collection, as well as a number of commonly used exceptions and attributes.
`System.Collections` `System.Collections.Generic`	These namespaces define a number of stock container objects (`ArrayList`, `Queue`, and so forth), as well as base types and interfaces that allow you to build customized collections. As of .NET 2.0, the collection types have been extended with generic capabilities.

`System.Data`
`System.Data.Odbc`
`System.Data.OracleClient`
`System.Data.OleDb`
`System.Data.SqlClient`
	These namespaces are used for interacting with databases using ADO.NET.

`System.Diagnostics`	Here, you find numerous types that can be used to programmatically debug and trace your source code.

`System.Drawing`
`System.Drawing.Drawing2D`
`System.Drawing.Printing`
	Here, you find numerous types wrapping graphical primitives such as bitmaps, fonts, and icons, as well as printing capabilities.

Continued

Table 1-4. *(Continued)*

.NET Namespace	Meaning in Life

`System.IO`
`System.IO.Compression`
`System.IO.Ports`
	These namespaces include file I/O, buffering, and so forth. As of .NET 2.0, the `IO` namespaces now include support compression and port manipulation.

`System.Net`	This namespace (as well as other related namespaces) contains types related to network programming (requests/responses, sockets, end points, and so on).
`System.Reflection` `System.Reflection.Emit`	These namespaces define types that support runtime type discovery as well as dynamic creation of types.
`System.Runtime.` `InteropServices`	This namespace provides facilities to allow .NET types to interact with "unmanaged code" (e.g., C-based DLLs and COM servers) and vice versa.
`System.Runtime.Remoting`	This namespace (among others) defines types used to build solutions that incorporate the .NET remoting layer.
`System.Security`	Security is an integrated aspect of the .NET universe. In the security-centric namespaces you find numerous types dealing with permissions, cryptography, and so on.
`System.Threading`	This namespace defines types used to build multithreaded applications.
`System.Web`	A number of namespaces are specifically geared toward the development of .NET web applications, including ASP.NET and XML web services.
`System.Windows.Forms`	This namespace contains types that facilitate the construction of traditional desktop GUI applications.
`System.Xml`	The XML-centric namespaces contain numerous types used to interact with XML data.

Accessing a Namespace Programmatically

It is worth reiterating that a namespace is nothing more than a convenient way for us mere humans to logically understand and organize related types. Consider again the `System` namespace. From your perspective, you can assume that `System.Console` represents a class named *Console* that is contained within a namespace called *System*. However, in the eyes of the .NET runtime, this is not so. The runtime engine only sees a single entity named *System.Console*.

In C#, the `using` keyword simplifies the process of referencing types defined in a particular namespace. Here is how it works. Let's say you are interested in building a traditional desktop application. The main window renders a bar chart based on some information obtained from a back-end database and displays your company logo. While learning the types each namespace contains takes study and experimentation, here are some obvious candidates to reference in your program:

```
// Here are all the namespaces used to build this application.
using System;                          // General base class library types.
using System.Drawing;                  // Graphical rendering types.
using System.Windows.Forms;            // GUI widget types.
using System.Data;                     // General data-centric types.
using System.Data.SqlClient;           // MS SQL Server data access types.
```

Once you have specified some number of namespaces (and set a reference to the assemblies that define them), you are free to create instances of the types they contain. For example, if you are interested in creating an instance of the `Bitmap` class (defined in the `System.Drawing` namespace), you can write:

```
// Explicitly list the namespaces used by this file.
using System;
using System.Drawing;

class MyApp
{
     public void DisplayLogo()
     {
          // Create a 20_20 pixel bitmap.
          Bitmap companyLogo = new Bitmap(20, 20);
          ...
     }
}
```

Because your application is referencing `System.Drawing`, the compiler is able to resolve the `Bitmap` class as a member of this namespace. If you did not specify the `System.Drawing` namespace, you would be issued a compiler error. However, you are free to declare variables using a *fully qualified name* as well:

```
// Not listing System.Drawing namespace!
using System;

class MyApp
{
     public void DisplayLogo()
     {
          // Using fully qualified name.
          System.Drawing.Bitmap companyLogo =
               new System.Drawing.Bitmap(20, 20);
          ...
     }
}
```

While defining a type using the fully qualified name provides greater readability, I think you'd agree that the C# `using` keyword reduces keystrokes. In this text, I will avoid the use of fully qualified names (unless there is a definite ambiguity to be resolved) and opt for the simplified approach of the C# `using` keyword.

However, always remember that this technique is simply a shorthand notation for specifying a type's fully qualified name, and each approach results in the *exact* same underlying CIL (given the fact that CIL code always makes use of fully qualified names) and has no effect on performance or the size of the assembly.

Referencing External Assemblies

In addition to specifying a namespace via the C# `using` keyword, you also need to tell the C# compiler the name of the assembly containing the actual CIL definition for the referenced type. As mentioned, many core .NET namespaces live within `mscorlib.dll`. However, the `System.Drawing.Bitmap` type is contained within a separate assembly named `System.Drawing.dll`. A vast majority of the .NET Framework assemblies are located under a specific directory termed the *global assembly cache* (*GAC*). On a Windows machine, this can be located under %windir%\Assembly, as shown in Figure 1-5.

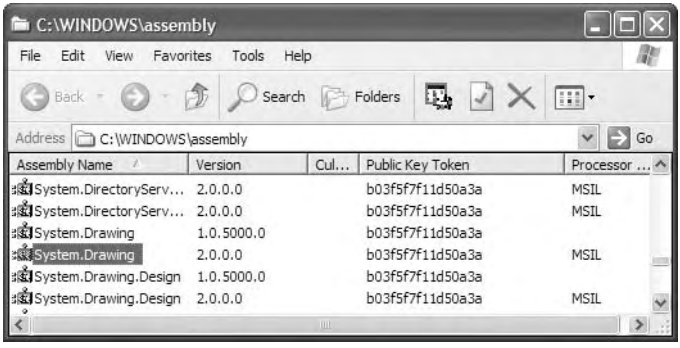


Figure 1-5. *The base class libraries reside in the GAC.*

Depending on the development tool you are using to build your .NET applications, you will have various ways to inform the compiler which assemblies you wish to include during the compilation cycle. You'll examine how to do so in the next chapter, so I'll hold off on the details for now.

Using ildasm.exe

If you are beginning to feel a tad overwhelmed at the thought of gaining mastery over every namespace in the .NET platform, just remember that what makes a namespace unique is that it contains types that are somehow *semantically related*. Therefore, if you have no need for a user interface beyond a simple console application, you can forget all about the `System.Windows.Forms` and `System.Web` namespaces (among others). If you are building a painting application, the database namespaces are most likely of little concern. Like any new set of prefabricated code, you learn as you go.

The Intermediate Language Disassembler utility (`ildasm.exe`) allows you to load up any .NET assembly and investigate its contents, including the associated manifest, CIL code, and type metadata. By default, `ildasm.exe` should be installed under C:\Program Files\Microsoft Visual Studio 8\SDK\v2.0\Bin (if you cannot find `ildasm.exe` in this location, simply search your machine for a file named "ildasm.exe").

Once you locate and run this tool, proceed to the File ➤ Open menu command and navigate to an assembly you wish to explore. By way of illustration, here is the `CSharpCalculator.exe` assembly shown earlier in this chapter (see Figure 1-6). `ildasm.exe` presents the structure of an assembly using a familiar tree-view format.

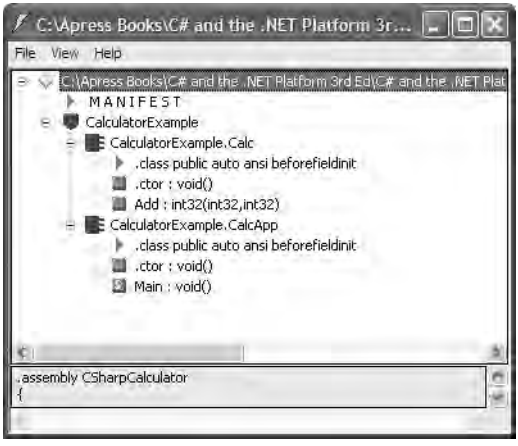


Figure 1-6. *Your new best friend, ildasm.exe*

Viewing CIL Code

In addition to showing the namespaces, types, and members contained in a given assembly, `ildasm.exe` also allows you to view the CIL instructions for a given member. For example, if you were to double-click the `Main()` method of the `CalcApp` class, a separate window would display the underlying CIL (see Figure 1-7).

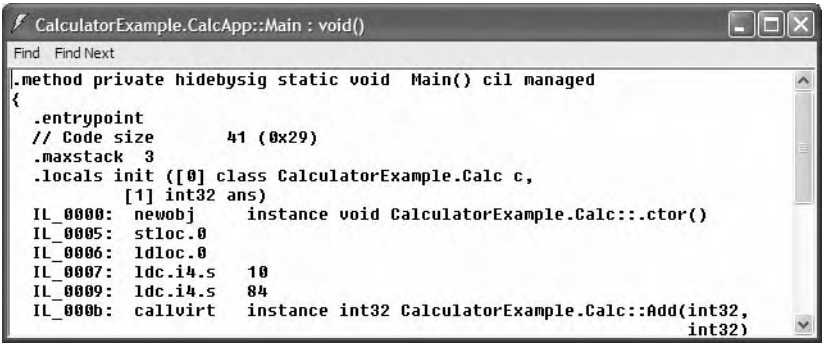


Figure 1-7. *Viewing the underlying CIL*

Viewing Type Metadata

If you wish to view the type metadata for the currently loaded assembly, press Ctrl+M. Figure 1-8 shows the metadata for the `Calc.Add()` method.

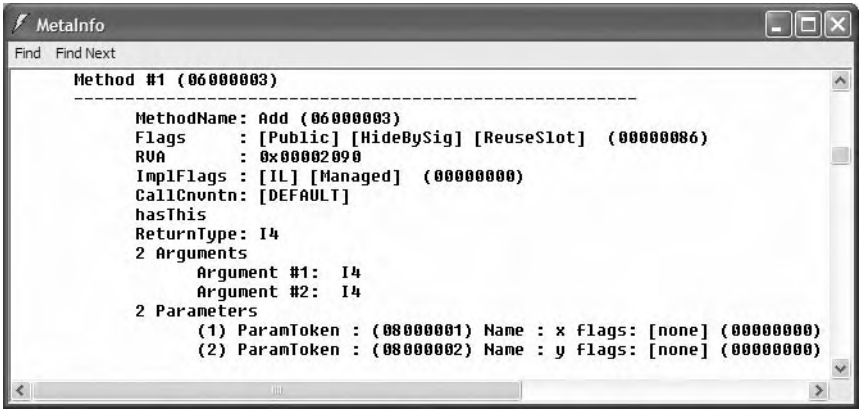


Figure 1-8. *Viewing type metadata via ildasm.exe*

Viewing Assembly Metadata

Finally, if you are interested in viewing the contents of the assembly's manifest, simply double-click the MANIFEST icon (see Figure 1-9).

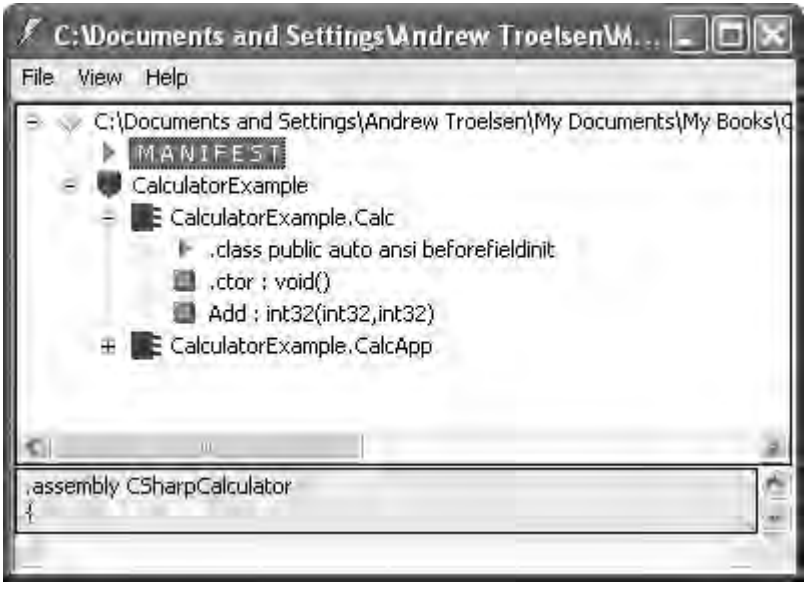


Figure 1-9. Double-click here to view the assembly manifest.

To be sure, `ildasm.exe` has more options than shown here, and I will illustrate additional features of the tool where appropriate in the text. As you read through this text, I strongly encourage you to open your assemblies using `ildasm.exe` to see how your C# code is processed into platform-agnostic CIL code. Although you do *not* need to become an expert in CIL code to be a C# superstar, understanding the syntax of CIL will only strengthen your programming muscle.

Deploying the .NET Runtime

It should come as no surprise that .NET assemblies can be executed only on a machine that has the .NET Framework installed. As an individual who builds .NET software, this should never be an issue, as your development machine will be properly configured at the time you install the freely available .NET Framework 2.0 SDK (as well as commercial .NET development environments such as Visual Studio 2005).

However, if you deploy an assembly to a computer that does not have .NET installed, it will fail to run. For this reason, Microsoft provides a setup package named `dotnetfx.exe` that can be freely shipped and installed along with your custom software. This installation program is included with the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK, and it is also freely downloadable from Microsoft.

Once `dotnetfx.exe` is installed, the target machine will now contain the .NET base class libraries, .NET runtime (`mscoree.dll`), and additional .NET infrastructure (such as the GAC).

■ **Note** Do be aware that if you are building a .NET web application, the end user's machine does not need to be configured with the .NET Framework, as the browser will simply receive generic HTML and possibly client-side JavaScript.

The Platform-Independent Nature of .NET

To close this chapter, allow me to briefly comment on the platform-independent nature of the .NET platform. To the surprise of most developers, .NET assemblies can be developed and executed on non-Microsoft operating systems (Mac OS X, numerous Linux distributions, BeOS, and FreeBSD, to name a few). To understand how this is possible, you need to come to terms to yet another abbreviation in the .NET universe: CLI (Common Language Infrastructure).

When Microsoft released the C# programming language and the .NET platform, it also crafted a set of formal documents that described the syntax and semantics of the C# and CIL languages, the .NET assembly format, core .NET namespaces, and the mechanics of a hypothetical .NET runtime engine (known as the Virtual Execution System, or VES). Better yet, these documents have been submitted to Ecma International as official international standards (`http://www.ecma-international.org`). The specifications of interest are

- ECMA-334: The C# Language Specification
- ECMA-335: The Common Language Infrastructure (CLI)

The importance of these documents becomes clear when you understand that they enable third parties to build distributions of the .NET platform for any number of operating systems and/or processors. ECMA-335 is perhaps the more "meaty" of the two specifications, so much so that is has been broken into five partitions, as shown in Table 1-5.

Table 1-5. *Partitions of the CLI*

Partitions of ECMA-335	Meaning in Life
Partition I: Architecture	Describes the overall architecture of the CLI, including the rules of the CTS and CLS, and the mechanics of the .NET runtime engine
Partition II: Metadata	Describes the details of .NET metadata
Partition III: CIL	Describes the syntax and semantics of CIL code
Partition IV: Libraries	Gives a high-level overview of the minimal and complete class libraries that must be supported by a .NET distribution.
Partition V: Annexes	A collection of "odds and ends" details such as class library design guidelines and the implementation details of a CIL compiler

Be aware that Partition IV (Libraries) defines only a *minimal* set of namespaces that represent the core services expected by a CLI distribution (collections, console I/O, file I/O, threading, reflection, network access, core security needs, XML manipulation, and so forth). The CLI does *not* define namespaces that facilitate web development (ASP.NET), database access (ADO.NET), or desktop graphical user interface (GUI) application development (Windows Forms).

The good news, however, is that the mainstream .NET distributions extend the CLI libraries with Microsoft-compatible equivalents of ASP.NET, ADO.NET, and Windows Forms in order to provide full-featured, production-level development platforms. To date, there are two major implementations of the CLI (beyond Microsoft's Windows-specific offering). Although this text focuses on the creation of .NET applications using Microsoft's .NET distribution, Table 1-6 provides information regarding the Mono and Portable .NET projects.

Table 1-6. *Open Source .NET Distributions*

Distribution	Meaning in Life
`http://www.mono-project.com`	The Mono project is an open source distribution of the CLI that targets various Linux distributions (e.g., SuSE, Fedora, and so on) as well as Win32 and Mac OS X.
`http://www.dotgnu.org`	Portable.NET is another open source distribution of the CLI that runs on numerous operating systems. Portable.NET aims to target as many operating systems as possible (Win32, AIX, BeOS, Mac OS X, Solaris, all major Linux distributions, and so on).

Both Mono and Portable.NET provide an ECMA-compliant C# compiler, .NET runtime engine, code samples, documentation, as well as numerous development tools that are functionally equivalent to the tools that ship with Microsoft's .NET Framework 2.0 SDK. Furthermore, Mono and Portable.NET collectively ship with a VB .NET, Java, and C complier.

■ **Note** If you wish to learn more about Mono or Portable.NET, check out *Cross-Platform .NET Development: Using Mono, Portable.NET, and Microsoft .NET* by M. J. Easton and Jason King (Apress, 2004).

Summary

The point of this chapter was to lay out the conceptual framework necessary for the remainder of this book. I began by examining a number of limitations and complexities found within the technologies prior to .NET, and followed up with an overview of how .NET and C# attempt to simplify the current state of affairs.

.NET basically boils down to a runtime execution engine (`mscoree.dll`) and base class library (`mscorlib.dll` and associates). The common language runtime (CLR) is able to host any .NET binary (aka assembly) that abides by the rules of managed code. As you have seen, assemblies contain CIL instructions (in addition to type metadata and the assembly manifest) that are compiled to platform-specific instructions using a just-in-time (JIT) compiler. In addition, you explored the role of the Common Language Specification (CLS) and Common Type System (CTS).

This was followed by an examination of the `ildasm.exe` utility, as well as coverage of how to configure a machine to host .NET applications using `dotnetfx.exe`. I wrapped up by briefly addressing the platform-independent nature of C# and the .NET platform.

CHAPTER 2

Building C# Applications

As a C# programmer, you may choose among numerous tools to build .NET applications. The point of this chapter is to provide a tour of various .NET development options, including, of course, Visual Studio 2005. The chapter opens, however, with an examination of working with the C# command-line compiler, `csc.exe`, and the simplest of all text editors, Notepad (`notepad.exe`). Along the way, you will also learn about the process of debugging .NET assemblies at the command line using `cordbg.exe`. Once you become comfortable compiling and debugging assemblies "IDE-free," you will then examine how the TextPad application allows you to edit and compile C# source code files in a (slightly) more sophisticated manner.

While you could work through this entire text using nothing other than `csc.exe` and Notepad/TextPad, I'd bet you are also interested in working with feature-rich integrated development environments (IDEs). To this end, you will be introduced to an open source IDE named SharpDevelop. This IDE rivals the functionality of many commercial .NET development environments (and it's free!). After briefly examining the Visual C# 2005 Express IDE, you will turn your attention to Visual Studio 2005. This chapter wraps up with a quick tour of a number of complementary .NET development tools (many of which are open source) and describes where to obtain them.

Installing the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK

Before you are able to build .NET applications using the C# programming language and the .NET Framework, the first step is to install the freely downloadable .NET Framework 2.0 Software Development Kit (SDK). Do be aware that the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK is automatically installed with Visual Studio 2005 as well as Visual C# 2005 Express; therefore, if you plan to use either of these IDEs, there is no need to manually download or install this software package.

If you are not developing with Visual Studio 2005/Visual C# 2005 Express, navigate to `http://msdn.microsoft.com/netframework` and search for ".NET Framework 2.0 SDK". Once you have located the appropriate page, download `setup.exe` and save it to a location on your hard drive. At this point, double-click the executable to install the software.

After the installation process has completed, your development machine will not only be configured with the necessary .NET infrastructure, but also now contain numerous development tools, a very robust help system, sample code, and tutorials, as well as various white papers.

By default, the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK is installed under C:\Program Files\Microsoft Visual Studio 8\SDK\v2.0. Here you will find `StartHere.htm`, which (as the name suggests) serves as an entry point to other related documentation. Table 2-1 describes the details behind some of the core subdirectories off the installation root.

Table 2-1. *Subdirectories of the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK Installation Root*

Subdirectory	Meaning in Life
\Bin	Contains a majority of the .NET development tools. Check out `StartTools.htm` for a description of each utility.
\Bootstrapper	Although you can ignore most of the content in the directory, be aware that `dotnetfx.exe` (see Chapter 1) resides under the `\Packages\DotNetFx` subdirectory.
\CompactFramework	Contains the installer program for the .NET Compact Framework 2.0.
\Samples	Provides the setup program (and core content) for the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK samples. To learn how to install the samples, consult `StartSamples.htm`.

In addition to the content installed under C:\Program Files\Microsoft Visual Studio 8\SDK\v2.0, the setup program also creates the Microsoft.NET\Framework subdirectory under your Windows directory. Here you will find a subdirectory for each version of the .NET Framework installed on your machine. Within a version-specific subdirectory, you will find command-line compilers for each language that ships with the Microsoft .NET Framework (CIL, C#, Visual Basic .NET, J#, and JScript .NET), as well as additional command-line development utilities and .NET assemblies.

The C# Command-Line Compiler (csc.exe)

There are a number of techniques you may use to compile C# source code. In addition to Visual Studio 2005 (as well as various third-party .NET IDEs), you are able to create .NET assemblies using the C# command-line compiler, `csc.exe` (where `csc` stands for *C-Sharp Compiler*). This tool is included with the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK. While it is true that you may never decide to build a large-scale application using the command-line compiler, it is important to understand the basics of how to compile your `*.cs` files by hand. I can think of a few reasons you should get a grip on the process:

- The most obvious reason is the simple fact that you might not have a copy of Visual Studio 2005.
- You plan to make use of automated build tools such as MSBuild or NAnt.
- You want to deepen your understanding of C#. When you use graphical IDEs to build applications, you are ultimately instructing `csc.exe` how to manipulate your C# input files. In this light, it's edifying to see what takes place behind the scenes.

Another nice by-product of working with `csc.exe` in the raw is that you become that much more comfortable manipulating other command-line tools included with the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK. As you will see throughout this book, a number of important utilities are accessible only from the command line.

Configuring the C# Command-Line Compiler

Before you can begin to make use of the C# command-line compiler, you need to ensure that your development machine recognizes the existence of `csc.exe`. If your machine is not configured correctly, you are forced to specify the full path to the directory containing `csc.exe` before you can compile your C# files.

To equip your development machine to compile *.cs files from any directory, follow these steps (which assume a Windows XP installation; Windows NT/2000 steps will differ slightly):

1. Right-click the My Computer icon and select Properties from the pop-up menu.
2. Select the Advanced tab and click the Environment Variables button.
3. Double-click the Path variable from the System Variables list box.
4. Add the following line to the end of the current Path value (note each value in the Path variable is separated by a semicolon):

```
C:\Windows\Microsoft.NET\Framework\v2.0.50215
```

Of course, your entry may need to be adjusted based on your current version and location of the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK (so be sure to do a sanity check using Windows Explorer). Once you have updated the Path variable, you may take a test run by closing any command windows open in the background (to commit the settings), and then opening a new command window and entering

```
csc /?
```

If you set things up correctly, you should see a list of options supported by the C# compiler.

■ **Note** When specifying command-line arguments for a given .NET development tool, you may use either a - or / (e.g., `csc -?` or `csc /?`).

Configuring Additional .NET Command-Line Tools

Before you begin to investigate csc.exe, add the following additional Path variable to the System Variables list box (again, perform a sanity check to ensure a valid directory):

```
C:\Program Files\Microsoft Visual Studio 8\SDK\v2.0\Bin
```

Recall that this directory contains additional command-line tools that are commonly used during .NET development. With these two paths established, you should now be able to run any .NET utility from any command window. If you wish to confirm this new setting, close any open command windows, open a new command window, and enter the following command to view the options of the GAC utility, gacutil.exe:

```
gacutil /?
```

■ **Tip** Now that you have seen how to manually configure your machine, I'll let you in on a shortcut. The .NET Framework 2.0 SDK provides a preconfigured command window that recognizes all .NET command-line utilities out of the box. Using the Start button, activate the SDK Command Prompt located under the All Programs ➤ Microsoft .NET Framework SDK v2.0 menu selection.

Building C# Applications Using csc.exe

Now that your development machine recognizes `csc.exe`, the next goal is to build a simple single file assembly named `TestApp.exe` using the C# command-line compiler and Notepad. First, you need some source code. Open Notepad and enter the following:

```
// A simple C# application.
using System;

class TestApp
{
     public static void Main()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Testing! 1, 2, 3");
     }
}
```

Once you have finished, save the file in a convenient location (e.g., C:\CscExample) as `TestApp.cs`. Now, let's get to know the core options of the C# compiler. The first point of interest is to understand how to specify the name and type of assembly to create (e.g., a console application named `MyShell.exe`, a code library named `MathLib.dll`, a Windows Forms application named `MyWinApp.exe`, and so forth). Each possibility is represented by a specific flag passed into `csc.exe` as a command-line parameter (see Table 2-2).

Table 2-2. *Output-centric Options of the C# Compiler*

Option	Meaning in Life
`/out`	This option is used to specify the name of the assembly to be created. By default, the assembly name is the same as the name of the initial input `*.cs` file (in the case of a `*.dll`) or the name of the type containing the program's `Main()` method (in the case of an `*.exe`).
`/target:exe`	This option builds an executable console application. This is the default file output type, and thus may be omitted when building this application type.
`/target:library`	This option builds a single-file `*.dll` assembly.
`/target:module`	This option builds a *module*. Modules are elements of multifile assemblies (fully described in Chapter 11).
`/target:winexe`	Although you are free to build Windows-based applications using the `/target:exe` flag, the `/target:winexe` flag prevents a console window from appearing in the background.

To compile `TestApp.cs` into a console application named `TextApp.exe`, change to the directory containing your source code file and enter the following command set (note that command-line flags must come before the name of the input files, not after):

```
csc /target:exe TestApp.cs
```

Here I did not explicitly specify an `/out` flag, therefore the executable will be named `TestApp.exe`, given that `TestApp` is the class defining the program's entry point (the `Main()` method). Also be aware that most of the C# compiler flags support an abbreviated version, such as `/t` rather than `/target` (you can view all abbreviations by entering `csc /?` at the command prompt):

```
csc /t:exe TestApp.cs
```

Furthermore, given that the `/t:exe` flag is the default output used by the C# compiler, you could also compile `TestApp.cs` simply by typing

```
csc TestApp.cs
```

TestApp.exe can now be run from the command line (see Figure 2-1).

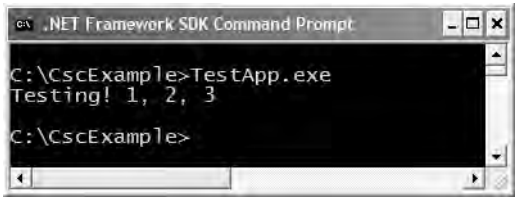


Figure 2-1. TestApp *in action*

Referencing External Assemblies

Next up, let's examine how to compile an application that makes use of types defined in a separate .NET assembly. Speaking of which, just in case you are wondering how the C# compiler understood your reference to the System.Console type, recall from Chapter 1 that mscorlib.dll is *automatically referenced* during the compilation process (if for some strange reason you wish to disable this behavior, you may specify the /nostdlib flag).

To illustrate the process of referencing external assemblies, let's update the TestApp application to display a Windows Forms message box. Open your TestApp.cs file and modify it as follows:

```
using System;

// Add this!
using System.Windows.Forms;

class TestApp
{
     public static void Main()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Testing! 1, 2, 3");

          // Add this!
          MessageBox.Show("Hello...");
     }
}
```

Notice the reference to the System.Windows.Forms namespace via the C# using keyword (introduced in Chapter 1). Recall that when you explicitly list the namespaces used within a given *.cs file, you avoid the need to make use of fully qualified names (which can lead to hand cramps).

At the command line, you must inform csc.exe which assembly contains the "used" namespaces. Given that you have made use of the MessageBox class, you must specify the System.Windows.Forms.dll assembly using the /reference flag (which can be abbreviated to /r):

```
csc /r:System.Windows.Forms.dll testapp.cs
```

If you now rerun your application, you should see what appears in Figure 2-2 in addition to the console output.



Figure 2-2. *Your first Windows Forms application*

Compiling Multiple Source Files with csc.exe

The current incarnation of the `TestApp.exe` application was created using a single `*.cs` source code file. While it is perfectly permissible to have all of your .NET types defined in a single `*.cs` file, most projects are composed of multiple `*.cs` files to keep your code base a bit more flexible. Assume you have authored an additional class contained in a new file named `HelloMsg.cs`:

```
// The HelloMessage class
using System;
using System.Windows.Forms;

class HelloMessage
{
    public void Speak()
    {
        MessageBox.Show("Hello...");
    }
}
```

Now, update your initial `TestApp` class to make use of this new type, and comment out the previous Windows Forms logic:

```
using System;

// Don't need this anymore.
// using System.Windows.Forms;

class TestApp
{
    public static void Main()
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Testing! 1, 2, 3");

        // Don't need this anymore either.
        // MessageBox.Show("Hello...");

        // Exercise the HelloMessage class!
        HelloMessage h = new HelloMessage();
        h.Speak();
     }
}
```

You can compile your C# files by listing each input file explicitly:

```
csc /r:System.Windows.Forms.dll testapp.cs hellomsg.cs
```

As an alternative, the C# compiler allows you to make use of the wildcard character (*) to inform `csc.exe` to include all `*.cs` files contained in the project directory as part of the current build:

```
csc /r:System.Windows.Forms.dll *.cs
```

When you run the program again, the output is identical. The only difference between the two applications is the fact that the current logic has been split among multiple files.

Referencing Multiple External Assemblies

On a related note, what if you need to reference numerous external assemblies using `csc.exe`? Simply list each assembly using a semicolon-delimited list. You don't need to specify multiple external assemblies for the current example, but some sample usage follows:

```
csc /r:System.Windows.Forms.dll;System.Drawing.dll *.cs
```

Working with csc.exe Response Files

As you might guess, if you were to build a complex C# application at the command prompt, your life would be full of pain as you type in the flags that specify numerous referenced assemblies and `*.cs` input files. To help lessen your typing burden, the C# compiler honors the use of *response files*.

C# response files contain all the instructions to be used during the compilation of your current build. By convention, these files end in a `*.rsp` (response) extension. Assume that you have created a response file named `TestApp.rsp` that contains the following arguments (as you can see, comments are denoted with the # character):

```
# This is the response file
# for the TestApp.exe app
# of Chapter 2.

# External assembly references.
/r:System.Windows.Forms.dll

# output and files to compile (using wildcard syntax).
/target:exe /out:TestApp.exe *.cs
```

Now, assuming this file is saved in the same directory as the C# source code files to be compiled, you are able to build your entire application as follows (note the use of the `@` symbol):

```
csc @TestApp.rsp
```

If the need should arise, you are also able to specify multiple `*.rsp` files as input (e.g., `csc @FirstFile.rsp @SecondFile.rsp @ThirdFile.rsp`). If you take this approach, do be aware that the compiler processes the command options as they are encountered! Therefore, command-line arguments in a later `*.rsp` file can override options in a previous response file.

Also note that flags listed explicitly on the command line before a response file will be overridden by the specified `*.rsp` file. Thus, if you were to enter

```
csc /out:MyCoolApp.exe @TestApp.rsp
```

the name of the assembly would still be `TestApp.exe` (rather than `MyCoolApp.exe`), given the `/out:TestApp.exe` flag listed in the `TestApp.rsp` response file. However, if you list flags after a response file, the flag will override settings in the response file. Thus, in the following command set, your assembly is indeed named `MyCoolApp.exe`.

```
csc @TestApp.rsp /out:MyCoolApp.exe
```

■ **Note** The `/reference` flag is cumulative. Regardless of where you specify external assemblies (before, after, or within a response file) the end result is a summation of each reference assembly.

The Default Response File (csc.rsp)

The final point to be made regarding response files is that the C# compiler has an associated default response file (`csc.rsp`), which is located in the same directory as `csc.exe` itself (e.g., C:\Windows\Microsoft.NET\Framework\v2.0.50215). If you were to open this file using Notepad, you will find that numerous .NET assemblies have already been specified using the `/r:` flag.

When you are building your C# programs using `csc.exe`, this file will be automatically referenced, even when you supply a custom `*.rsp` file. Given the presence of the default response file, the current `TestApp.exe` application could be successfully compiled using the following command set (as `System.Windows.Forms.dll` is referenced within `csc.rsp`):

```
csc /out:TestApp.exe *.cs
```

In the event that you wish to disable the automatic reading of `csc.rsp`, you can specify the `/noconfig` option:

```
csc @TestApp.rsp /noconfig
```

Obviously, the C# command-line compiler has many other options that can be used to control how the resulting .NET assembly is to be generated. If you wish to learn more details regarding the functionality of `csc.exe`, look up my article titled "Working with the C# 2.0 Command Line Compiler" online at `http://msdn.microsoft.com`.

The Command-Line Debugger (cordbg.exe)

Before moving on to our examination of building C# applications using TextPad, I would like to briefly point out that the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK does ship with a command-line debugger named `cordbg.exe`. This tool provides dozens of options that allow you to debug your assembly. You may view them by specifying the `/?` flag:

```
cordbg /?
```

Table 2-3 documents some (but certainly not all) of the flags recognized by `cordbg.exe` (with the alternative shorthand notation) once you have entered a debugging session.

Table 2-3. *A Handful of Useful* `cordbg.exe` *Command-Line Flags*

Flag	Meaning in Life
`b[reak]`	Set or display current breakpoints.
`del[ete]`	Remove one or more breakpoints.
`ex[it]`	Exit the debugger.
`g[o]`	Continue debugging the current process until hitting next breakpoint.
`o[ut]`	Step out of the current function.
`p[rint]`	Print all loaded variables (local, arguments, etc.).
`si`	Step into the next line.
`so`	Step over the next line.

As I assume that most of you will choose to make use of the Visual Studio 2005 integrated debugger, I will not bother to comment on each flag of `cordbg.exe`. However, for those of you who are interested, the following section presents a minimal walk-through of the basic process of debugging at the command line.

Debugging at the Command Line

Before you can debug your application using `cordbg.exe`, the first step is to generate debugging symbols for your current application by specifying the `/debug` flag of `csc.exe`. For example, to generate debugging data for `TestApp.exe`, enter the following command set:

```
csc @testapp.rsp /debug
```

This generates a new file named (in this case) `testapp.pdb`. If you do not have an associated `*.pdb` file, it is still possible to make use of `cordbg.exe`; however, you will not be able to view your C# source code during the process (which is typically no fun whatsoever, unless you wish to complicate matters by reading CIL code).

Once you have generated a `*.pdb` file, open a session with `cordbg.exe` by specifying your .NET assembly as a command-line argument (the `*.pdb` file will be loaded automatically):

```
cordbg.exe testapp.exe
```

At this point, you are in debugging mode and may apply any number of `cordbg.exe` flags at the `(cordbg)` command prompt (see Figure 2-3).

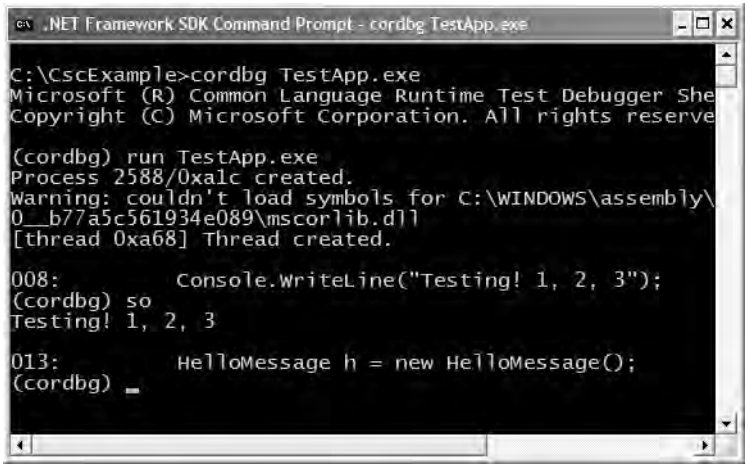

.NET Framework SDK Command Prompt - cordbg TestApp.exe
C:\CscExample>cordbg TestApp.exe
Microsoft (R) Common Language Runtime Test Debugger She
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserve
(cordbg) run TestApp.exe
Process 2588/0xa1c created.
Warning: couldn't load symbols for C:\WINDOWS\assembly\
0__b77a5c561934e089\mscorlib.dll
[thread 0xa68] Thread created.
008: Console.WriteLine("Testing! 1, 2, 3");
(cordbg) so
Testing! 1, 2, 3
013: HelloMessage h = new HelloMessage();
(cordbg)

Figure 2-3. *Debugging with* `cordbg.exe`

When you wish to quit debugging with `cordbg.exe`, simply type `exit` (or the shorthand `ex`). Again, unless you are a command-line junkie, I assume you will opt for the graphical debugger provided by your IDE. If you require more information, look up `cordbg.exe` in the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Building .NET Applications Using TextPad

While Notepad is fine for creating simple .NET programs, it offers nothing in the way of developer productivity. It would be ideal to author `*.cs` files using an editor that supports (at a minimum) keyword coloring, code snippets, and integration with a C# compiler. As luck would have it, such a tool does exist: TextPad.

TextPad is an editor you can use to author and compile code for numerous programming languages, including C#. The chief advantage of this product is the fact that it is very simple to use and provides just enough bells and whistles to enhance your coding efforts.

To obtain TextPad, navigate to `http://www.textpad.com` and download the current version (4.7.3 at the time of this writing). Once you have installed the product, you will have a feature-complete version of TextPad; however, this tool is not freeware. Until you purchase a single-user license (for around US$30.00 at the time of this writing), you will be presented with a "friendly reminder" each time you run the application.

Enabling C# Keyword Coloring

TextPad is not equipped to understand C# keywords or work with `csc.exe` out of the box. To do so, you will need to install an additional add-on. Navigate to `http://www.textpad.com/add-ons/syna2g.html` and download `csharp8.zip` using the "C# 2005" link option. This add-on takes into account the new keywords introduced with C# 2005 (in contrast to the "C#" link, which is limited to C# 1.1).

Once you have unzipped `csharp8.zip`, place a copy of the extracted `csharp8.syn` file in the Samples subdirectory of the TextPad installation (e.g., C:\Program Files\TextPad 4\Samples). Next, launch TextPad and perform the following tasks using the New Document Wizard.

1. Activate the Configure ➤ New Document Class menu option.
2. Enter the name **C# 2.0** in the "Document class name" edit box.
3. In the next step, enter `*.cs` in the "Class members" edit box.
4. Finally, enable syntax highlighting, choose `csharp8.syn` from the drop-down list box, and close the wizard.

You can now tweak TextPad's C# support using the Document Classes node accessible from the Configure ➤ Preferences menu (see Figure 2-4).

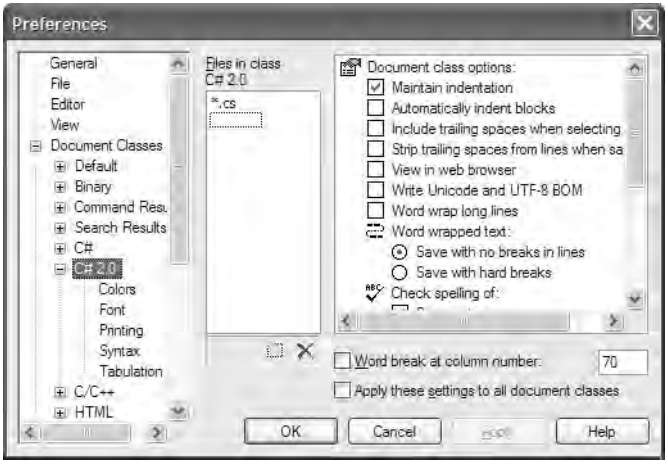


Figure 2-4. *Setting TextPad's C# preferences*

Configuring the *.cs File Filter

The next configuration detail is to create a filter for C# source code files displayed by the Open and Save dialog boxes:

1. Activate the Configure ➤ Preferences menu option and select File Name Filters from the tree view control.
2. Click the New button, and enter **C#** into the Description field and `*.cs` into the Wild cards text box.
3. Move your new filter to the top of the list using the Move Up button and click OK.

Create a new file (using File ➤ New) and save it in a convenient location (such as C:\TextPadTestApp) as `TextPadTest.cs`. Next, enter a trivial class definition (see Figure 2-5).

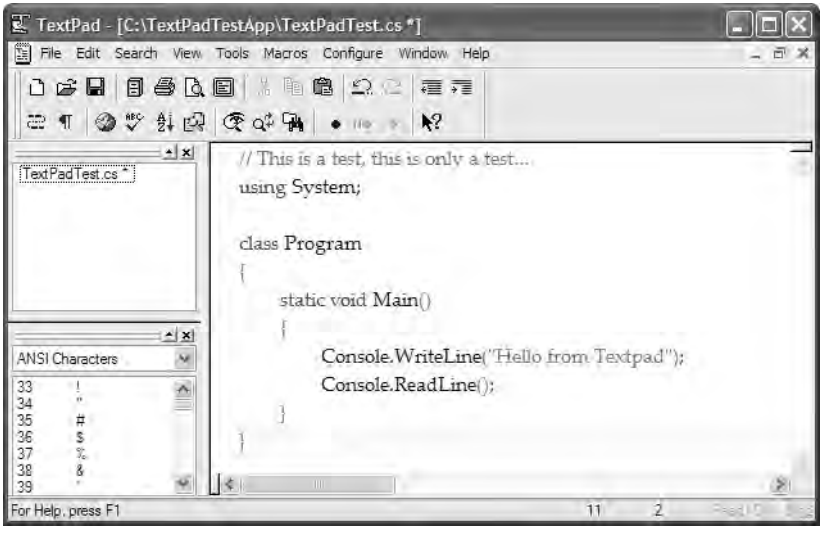


Figure 2-5. `TextPadTest.cs`

Hooking Into csc.exe

The last major configuration detail to contend with is to associate `csc.exe` with TextPad so you can compile your C# files. The first way to do so is using the Tools ➤ Run menu option. Here you are presented with a dialog box that allows you to specify the name of the tool to run and any necessary command-line flags. To compile `TextPadTest.cs` into a .NET console-based executable, follow these steps:

1. Enter the full path to `csc.exe` into the Command text box (e.g., C:\Windows\Microsoft.NET\Framework\v2.0. 50215\csc.exe).
2. Enter the command-line options you wish to specify within the Parameters text box (e.g., `/out:myApp.exe *.cs`). Recall that you can specify a custom response file to simplify matters (e.g., `@myInput.rsp`).

3. Enter the directory containing the input files via the Initial folder text box (C:\TextPadTestApp in this example).
4. If you wish TextPad to capture the compiler output directly (rather than within a separate command window), select the Capture Output check box.

Figure 2-6 shows the complete compilation settings.

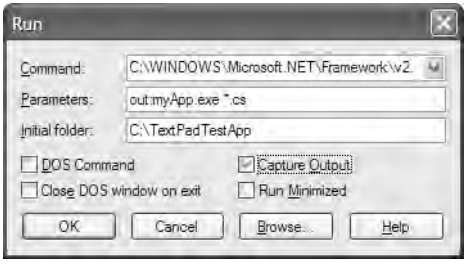


Figure 2-6. *Specifying a custom Run command*

At this point, you can either run your program by double-clicking the executable using Windows Explorer or leverage the Tools ➤ Run menu option to specify `myApp.exe` as the current command (see Figure 2-7).



Figure 2-7. *Instructing TextPad to run* `myApp.exe`

When you click OK, you should see the program's output ("Hello from TextPad") displayed in the Command Results document.

Associating Run Commands with Menu Items

TextPad also allows you to create custom menu items that represent predefined run commands. Let's create a custom item under the Tools menu named "Compile C# Console" that will compile all C# files in the current directory:

1. Activate the Configure ➤ Preferences menu option and select Tools from the tree view control.
2. Using the Add button, select Program and specify the full path to `csc.exe`.

3. If you wish, rename `csc.exe` to a more descriptive label (Compile C#) by clicking the tool name and then clicking OK.
4. Finally, activate the Configure ➤ Preferences menu option once again, but this time select Compile C# from the Tools node, and specify `*.cs` as the sole value in the Parameters field (see Figure 2-8).

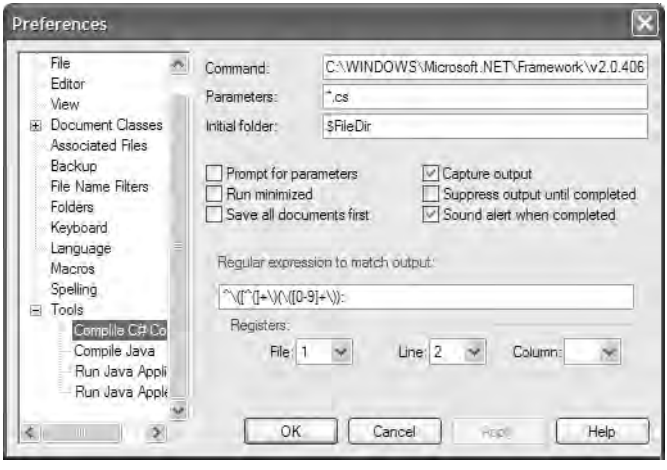


Figure 2-8. *Creating a Tools menu item*

With this, you can now compile all C# files in the current directory using your custom Tools menu item.

Enabling C# Code Snippets

Before leaving behind the world of TextPad, there is one final free add-on you might wish to install. Navigate to `http://www.textpad.com/add-ons/cliplibs.html` and download `csharp_1.zip` using the C# clip library provided by Sean Gephardt. Extract the contained `csharp.tcl` file and place it in the Samples subdirectory. When you restart TextPad, you should find a new clip library named C Sharp Helpers available from the Clip Library drop-down list (see Figure 2-9). Double-clicking any item will insert the related C# code in the active document at the location of the cursor.

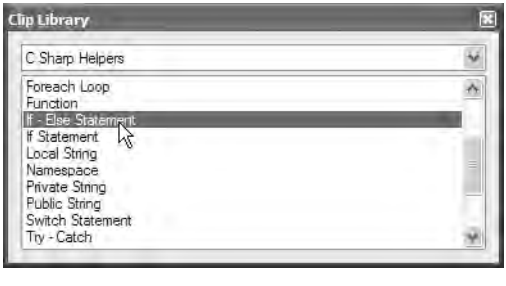


Figure 2-9. *C# code snippets à la TextPad*

As you may agree, TextPad is a step in the right direction when contrasted to Notepad and the command prompt. However, TextPad does not (currently) provide IntelliSense capabilities for C# code, GUI designers, project templates, or database manipulation tools. To address such needs, allow me to introduce the next .NET development tool: SharpDevelop.

Building .NET Applications Using SharpDevelop

SharpDevelop is an open source and feature-rich IDE that you can use to build .NET assemblies using C#, VB .NET, Managed Extensions for C++, or CIL. Beyond the fact that this IDE is completely free, it is interesting to note that it was written entirely in C#. In fact, you have the choice to download and compile the `*.cs` files manually or run a `setup.exe` program to install SharpDevelop on your development machine. Both distributions can be obtained from `http://www.icsharpcode.net/OpenSource/SD/Download`.

Once you have installed SharpDevelop, the File ➤ New ➤ Combine menu option allows you to pick which type of project you wish to generate (and in which .NET language). In the lingo of SharpDevelop, a *combine* is a collection of individual projects (analogous to a Visual Studio *solution*). Assume you have created a C# Windows Application named MySDWinApp (see Figure 2-10).

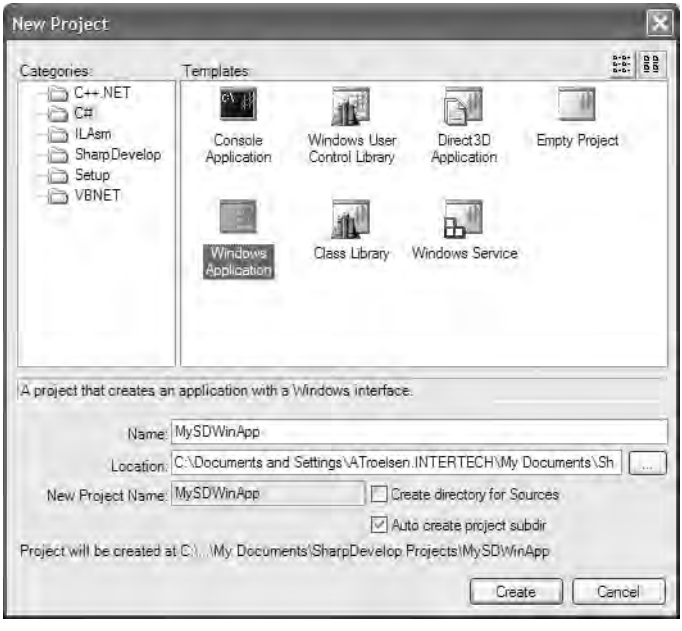


Figure 2-10. *The SharpDevelop New Project dialog box*

■ **Note** Be aware that version 1.0 of SharpDevelop is configured to make use of the C# 1.1 compiler. To make use of the new C# 2005 language features and .NET Framework 2.0 namespaces, you will need to activate the Project ➤ Project options menu item and update the compiler version from the Runtime/Compiler option page.

Learning the Lay of the Land: SharpDevelop

SharpDevelop provides numerous productivity enhancements and in many cases is as feature rich as Visual Studio .NET 2003 (but not currently as powerful as Visual Studio 2005). Here is a hit list of some of the major benefits:

- Support for the Microsoft and Mono C# compilers
- IntelliSense and code expansion capabilities
- An Add Reference dialog box to reference external assemblies, including assemblies deployed to the GAC
- A visual Windows Forms designer
- Various project perspective windows (termed *scouts*) to view your projects
- An integrated object browser utility (the Assembly Scout)
- Database manipulation utilities
- A C# to VB .NET (and vice versa) code conversion utility
- Integration with the NUnit (a .NET unit test utility) and NAnt (a .NET build utility)
- Integration with the .NET Framework SDK documentation

Impressive for a free IDE, is it not? Although this chapter doesn't cover each of these points in detail, let's walk through a few items of interest. If you require further details of SharpDevelop, be aware that it ships with very thorough documentation accessible from the Help ➤ Help Topics menu option.

The Project and Classes Scouts

When you create a new combine, you can make use of the Project Scout to view the set of files, referenced assemblies, and resource files of each project (see Figure 2-11).

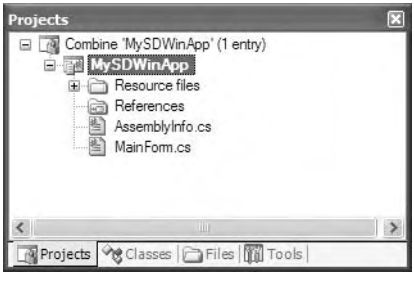


Figure 2-11. *The Project Scout*

When you wish to reference an external assembly for your current project, simply right-click the References icon within the Project Scout and select the Add Reference context menu. Once you do, you may select assemblies directly from the GAC as well as custom assemblies via the .NET Assembly Browser tab (see Figure 2-12).

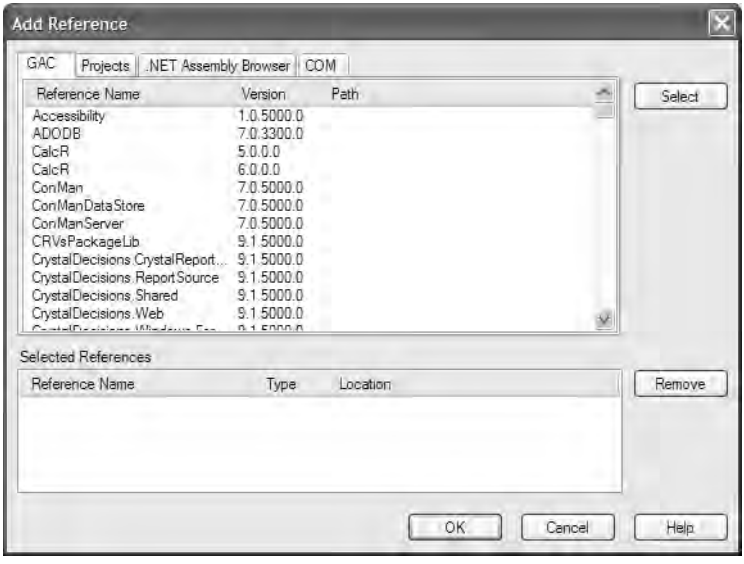


Figure 2-12. *The SharpDevelop Add Reference dialog box*

The Classes Scout provides a more object-oriented view of your combine in that it displays the namespaces, types, and members within each project (see Figure 2-13).



Figure 2-13. *The Classes Scout*

If you double-click any item, SharpDevelop responds by opening the corresponding file and placing your mouse cursor at the item's definition.

The Assembly Scout

The Assembly Scout utility (accessible from the View menu) allows you to graphically browse the assemblies referenced within your project. This tool is split into two panes. On the left is a tree view control that allows you to drill into an assembly and view its namespaces and the contained types (see Figure 2-14).



Figure 2-14. *Viewing referenced assemblies using the Assembly Scout*

The right side of the Assembly Scout utility allows you to view details of the item selected on the left pane. Not only can you view the basic details using the Info tab, but also you can also view the underlying CIL code of the item and save its definition to an XML file.

Windows Forms Designers

As you will learn later in this book, Windows Forms is a toolkit used to build desktop applications. To continue tinkering with SharpDevelop, click the Design tab located at the bottom of the `MainForm.cs` code window. Once you do, you will open the integrated Windows Forms designer.

Using the Windows Forms section of your Tools window, you can create a GUI for the Form you are designing. To demonstrate this, place a single Button type on your main Form by selecting the Button icon and clicking the designer. To update the look and feel of any GUI item, you can make use of the Properties window (see Figure 2-15), which you activate from the View ➤ Properties menu selection. Select the Button from the drop-down list and change various aspects of the Button type (e.g., BackColor and Text).



Figure 2-15. *The Properties window*

Using this same window, you can handle events for a given GUI item. To do so, click the lightning bolt icon at the top of the Properties window. Next, select the GUI item you wish to interact with from the drop-down list (your Button in this case). Finally, handle the `Click` event by typing in the name of the method to be called when the user clicks the button (see Figure 2-16).

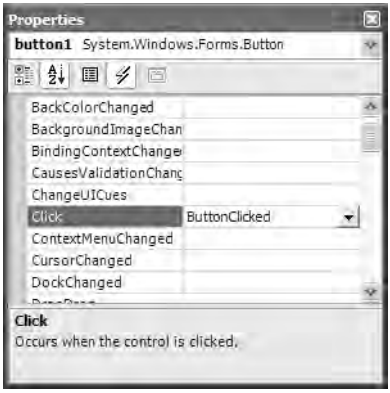


Figure 2-16. *Handing events via the Properties window*

Once you press the Enter key, SharpDevelop responds by generating stub code for your new method. To complete the example, enter the following statement within the scope of your event handler:

```
void ButtonClicked(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
    // Update the Form's caption with a custom message.
    this.Text = "Stop clicking my button!";
}
```

At this point, you can run your program (using the Debug ➤ Run menu item). Sure enough, when you click your Button, you should see the Form's caption update as expected.

That should be enough information to get you up and running using the SharpDevelop IDE. I do hope you now have a good understanding of the basics, though obviously there is much more to this tool than presented here.

Building .NET Applications Using Visual C# 2005 Express

During the summer of 2004, Microsoft introduced a brand-new line of IDEs that fall under the designation of "Express" products (`http://msdn.microsoft.com/express`). To date, there are six members of the Express family:

- *Visual Web Developer 2005 Express*: A lightweight tool for building dynamic websites and XML web services using ASP.NET 2.0
- *Visual Basic 2005 Express*: A streamlined programming tool ideal for novice programmers who want to learn how to build applications using the user-friendly syntax of Visual Basic .NET

- *Visual C# 2005 Express, Visual C++ 2005 Express, and Visual J# 2005 Express*: Targeted IDEs for students and enthusiasts who wish to learn the fundamentals of computer science in their syntax of choice
- *SQL Server 2005 Express*: An entry-level database management system geared toward hobbyists, enthusiasts, and student developers

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■ **Note** At the time of this writing, the Express family products are available as public betas free of charge.

By and large, Express products are slimmed-down versions of their Visual Studio 2005 counterparts and are primarily targeted at .NET hobbyists and students. Like SharpDevelop, Visual C# 2005 Express provides various browsing tools, a Windows Forms designer, the Add References dialog box, IntelliSense capabilities, and code expansion templates. As well, Visual C# 2005 Express offers a few (important) features currently not available in SharpDevelop, including

- An integrated graphical debugger
- Tools to simplify access to XML web services

Because the look and feel of Visual C# 2005 Express is so similar to that of Visual Studio 2005 (and, to some degree, SharpDevelop) I do not provide a walk-through of this particular IDE here. If you do wish to learn more about the product, look up my article "An Introduction to Programming Using Microsoft Visual C# 2005 Express Edition" online at `http://msdn.microsoft.com`.

The Big Kahuna: Building .NET Applications Using Visual Studio 2005

If you are a professional .NET software engineer, the chances are extremely good that your employer has purchased Microsoft's premier IDE, Visual Studio 2005, for your development endeavors (`http://msdn.microsoft.com/vstudio`). This tool is far and away the most feature-rich and enterprise-ready IDE examined in this chapter. Of course, this power comes at a price, which will vary based on the version of Visual Studio 2005 you purchase. As you might suspect, each version supplies a unique set of features.

My assumption during the remainder of this text is that you have chosen to make use of Visual Studio 2005 as your IDE of choice. Do understand that owning a copy of Visual Studio 2005 is *not* required for you to use this edition of the text. In the worst case, I may examine an option that is not provided by your IDE. However, rest assured that all of this book's sample code will compile just fine when processed by your tool of choice.

■ **Note** Once you download the source code for this book from the Downloads area of the Apress website (`http://www.apress.com`), you may load the current example into Visual Studio 2005 by double-clicking the example's `*.sln` file. If you are not using Visual Studio 2005, you will need to manually configure your IDE to compile the provided `*.cs` files.

Learning the Lay of the Land: Visual Studio 2005

Visual Studio 2005 ships with the expected GUI designers, database manipulation tools, object and project browsing utilities, and an integrated help system. Unlike the IDEs we have already examined, Visual Studio 2005 provides numerous additions. Here is a partial list:

- Visual XML editors/designers
- Support for mobile device development (such as Smartphones and Pocket PC devices)
- Support for Microsoft Office development
- The ability to track changes for a given source document and view revisions
- Integrated support for code refactoring
- An XML-based code expansion library
- Visual class design tools and object test utilities
- A code definition window (which replaces the functionality of the Windows Forms Class Viewer, `wincv.exe`, which shipped with .NET 1.1 and earlier)

To be completely honest, Visual Studio 2005 provides so many features that it would take an entire book (a large book at that) to fully describe every aspect of the IDE. This is not that book. However, I do want to point out some of the major enhancements in the pages that follow. As you progress through the text, you'll learn more about the Visual Studio 2005 IDE where appropriate.

The Solution Explorer Utility

If you are following along, create a new C# console application (named Vs2005Example) using the File ➤ New ➤ Project menu item. The Solution Explorer utility (accessible from the View menu) allows you to view the set of all content files and referenced assemblies that comprise the current project (see Figure 2-17).

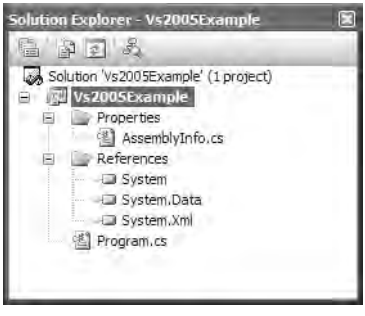


Figure 2-17. *Solution Explorer*

Notice that the References folder of Solution Explorer displays a list of each assembly you have currently referenced (console projects reference `System.dll`, `System.Data.dll`, and `System.Xml.dll` by default). When you need to reference additional assemblies, right-click the References folder and select Add Reference. At this point, you can select your assembly from the resulting dialog box.

■ **Note** Visual Studio 2005 now allows you to set references to executable assemblies (unlike Visual Studio .NET 2003, in which you were limited to `*.dll` code libraries).

Finally, notice an icon named Properties within Solution Explorer. When you double-click this item, you are presented with an enhanced project configuration editor (see Figure 2-18).

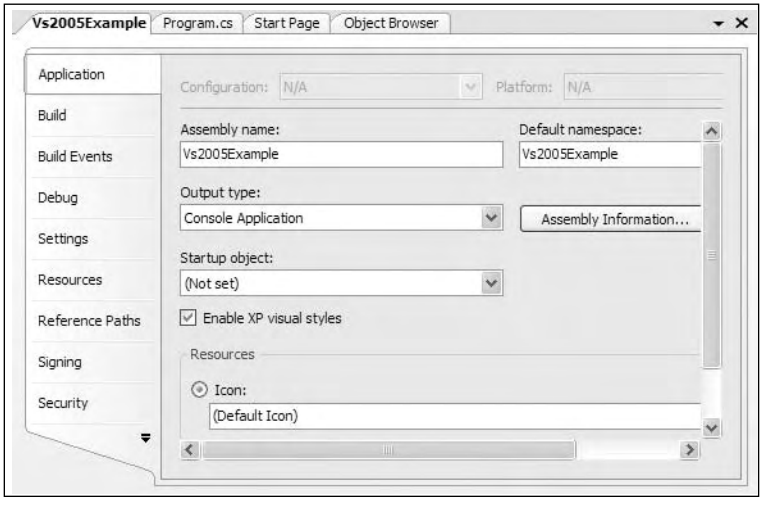


Figure 2-18. *The Project Properties window*

You will see various aspects of the Project Properties window as you progress through this text. However, if you take some time to poke around, you will see that you can establish various security settings, strongly name your assembly, insert string resources, and configure pre- and postbuild events.

The Class View Utility

The next tool to examine is the Class View utility, which you can load from the View menu. Like SharpDevelop, the purpose of this utility is to show all of the types in your current project from an object-oriented perspective. The top pane displays the set of namespaces and their types, while the bottom pane displays the currently selected type's members (see Figure 2-19).

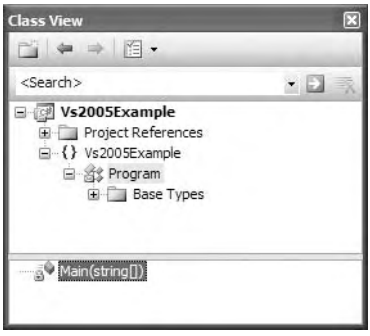


Figure 2-19. *The Class View utility*

The Code Definition Window

If you have a background in programming with .NET 1.1, you may be familiar with the Windows Forms Class Viewer utility, `wincv.exe`. This tool allowed you to type in the name of a .NET type and view its C# definition. While `wincv.exe` is deprecated with the release of .NET 2.0, an enhanced version of this tool has been integrated within Visual C# 2005 Express and Visual Studio 2005. You can activate the Code Definition window using the View menu. Simply place your mouse cursor over any type in your C# code files, and you will be presented with a snapshot of the type in question. For example, if you click the word "string" within your `Main()` method, you find the definition of the `System.String` class type (see Figure 2-20).

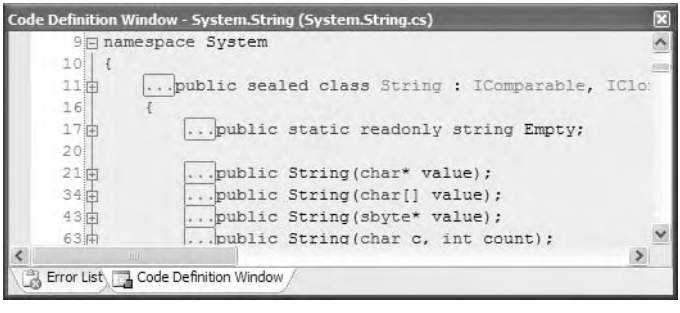


Figure 2-20. *The Code Definition window*

The Object Browser Utility

As you may recall from Chapter 1, Visual Studio 2005 also provides a utility to investigate the set of referenced assemblies within your current project. Activate the Object Browser using the View ➤ Other Windows menu, and then select the assembly you wish to investigate (see Figure 2-21).

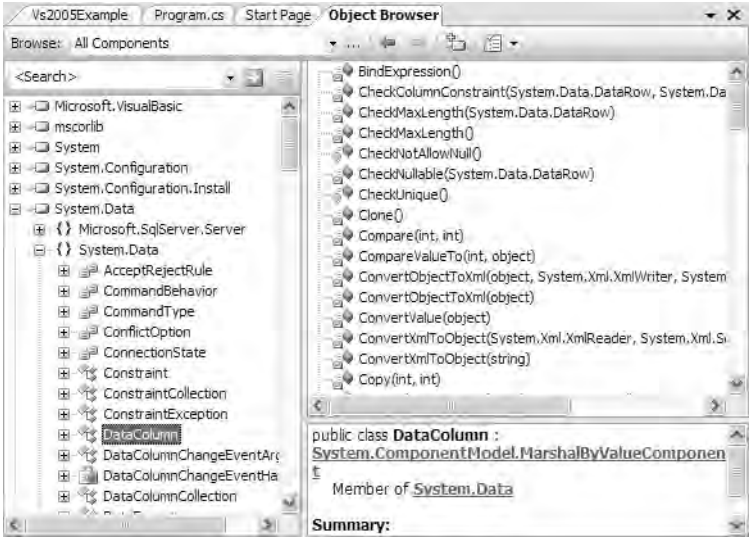


Figure 2-21. *The Visual Studio 2005 Object Browser utility*

Integrated Support for Code Refactoring

One major enhancement that ships with Visual Studio 2005 is intrinsic support to refactor existing code. Simply put, *refactoring* is a formal and mechanical process whereby you improve an existing code base. In the bad old days, refactoring typically involved a ton of manual labor. Luckily, Visual Studio 2005 does a great deal to automate the refactoring process. Using the Refactor menu, related keyboard shortcuts, smart tags, and/or context-sensitive mouse clicks, you can dramatically reshape your code with minimal fuss and bother. Table 2-4 defines some common refactorings recognized by Visual Studio 2005.

Table 2-4. *Visual Studio 2005 Refactorings*

Refactoring Technique	Meaning in Life
Extract Method	Allows you to define a new method based on a selection of code statements
Encapsulate Field	Turns a public field into a private field encapsulated by a C# property
Extract Interface	Defines a new interface type based on a set of existing type members
Reorder Parameters	Provides a way to reorder member arguments
Remove Parameters	Removes a given argument from the current list of parameters (as you would expect)
Rename	Allows you to rename a code token (method name, field, local variable, and so on) throughout a project
Promote Local Variable to Parameter	Moves a local variable to the parameter set of the defining method

To illustrate refactoring in action, update your `Main()` method with the following code:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Set up Console UI (CUI)
    Console.Title = "My Rocking App";
    Console.ForegroundColor = ConsoleColor.Yellow;
    Console.BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Blue;
    Console.WriteLine("************************************");
    Console.WriteLine("***** Welcome to My Rocking App *****");
    Console.WriteLine("************************************");
    Console.BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Black;

    // Wait for key press to close.
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

While there is nothing wrong with the preceding code as it now stands, imagine that you want to display this prompt at various places throughout your program. Rather than retyping the same exact console user interface logic, it would be ideal to have a helper function that could be called to do so. Given this, you will apply the Extract Method refactoring to your existing code. First, select each code statement (except the final call to `Console.ReadLine()`) within the editor. Now, right-click and select the Extract Method option from the Refactor context menu. Name your new method `ConfigureCUI()` in the resulting dialog box. When you have finished, you will find that your `Main()` method calls the newly generated `ConfigureCUI()` method, which now contains the previously selected code:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        ConfigureCUI();

        // Wait for key press to close.
        Console.ReadLine();
    }

    private static void ConfigureCUI()
    {
        // Set up Console UI (CUI)
        Console.Title = "My Rocking App";
        Console.ForegroundColor = ConsoleColor.Yellow;
        Console.BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Blue;
        Console.WriteLine("************************************");
        Console.WriteLine("***** Welcome to My Rocking App *****");
        Console.WriteLine("************************************");
        Console.BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Black;
    }
}
```

■ **Note** If you are interested in more information on the refactoring process and a detailed walk-through of each refactoring supported by Visual Studio 2005, look up my article "Refactoring C# Code Using Visual Studio 2005" online at `http://msdn.microsoft.com`.

Code Expansions and Surround with Technology

Visual Studio 2005 (as well as Visual C# 2005 Express) also has the capability to insert complex blocks of C# code using menu selections, context-sensitive mouse clicks, and/or keyboard shortcuts. The number of available code expansions is impressive and can be broken down into two main groups:

- *Snippets*: These templates insert common code blocks at the location of the mouse cursor.
- *Surround With*: These templates wrap a block of selected statements within a relevant scope.

To see this functionality firsthand, right-click a blank line within your `Main()` method and activate the Insert Snippet menu. Once you select a given item, you will find the related code is expanded automatically (press the Esc key to dismiss the pop-up menu).

If you were to right-click and select the Surround With menu, you would likewise be presented with a list of options. Be sure to take time to explore these predefined code expansion templates, as they can radically speed up the development process.

■ **Note** All code expansion templates are XML-based descriptions of the code to generate within the IDE. Using Visual Studio 2005 (as well as Visual C# 2005 Express), you can create your own custom code templates. Details of how to do so can be found in my article "Investigating Code Snippet Technology" at `http://msdn.microsoft.com`.

The Visual Class Designer

Visual Studio 2005 gives us the ability to design classes visually (but this capability is not included in Visual C# 2005 Express). The Class Designer utility allows you to view and modify the relationships of the types (classes, interfaces, structures, enumerations, and delegates) in your project. Using this tool, you are able to visually add (or remove) members to (or from) a type and have your modifications reflected in the corresponding C# file. As well, as you modify a given C# file, changes are reflected in the class diagram.

To work with this aspect of Visual Studio 2005, the first step is to insert a new class diagram file. There are many ways to do so, one of which is to click the View Class Diagram button located on Solution Explorer's right side (see Figure 2-22).

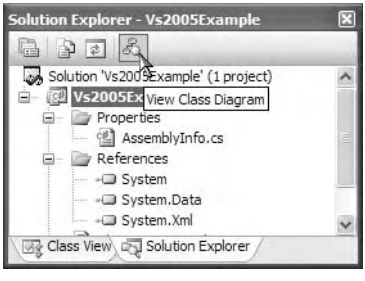


Figure 2-22. *Inserting a class diagram file*

Once you do, you will find class icons that represent the classes in your current project. If you click the arrow image, you can show or hide the type's members (see Figure 2-23).

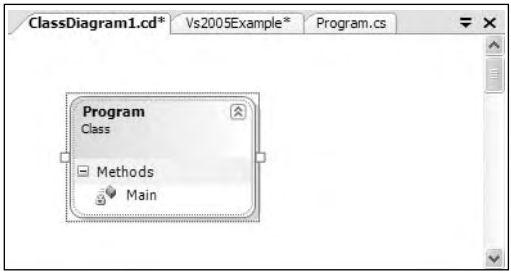


Figure 2-23. *The Class Diagram viewer*

This utility works in conjunction with two other aspects of Visual Studio 2005: the Class Details window (activated using the View ➤ Other Windows menu) and the Class Designer Toolbox (activated using the View ➤ Toolbox menu item). The Class Details window not only shows you the details of the currently selected item in the diagram, but also allows you to modify existing members and insert new members on the fly (see Figure 2-24).

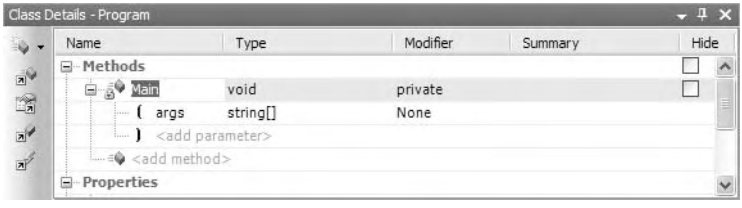


Figure 2-24. *The Class Details window*

The Class Designer Toolbox (see Figure 2-25) allows you to insert new types into your project (and create relationships between these types) visually. (Be aware you must have a class diagram as the active window to view this toolbox.) As you do so, the IDE automatically creates new C# type definitions in the background.

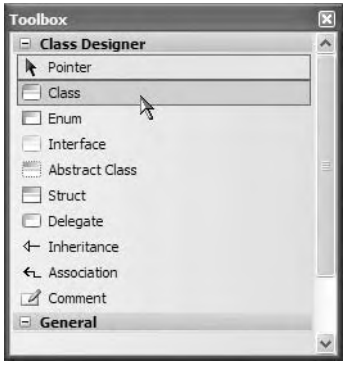


Figure 2-25. *Inserting a new class using the visual Class Designer*

By way of example, drag a new class from the Class Designer Toolbox onto your Class Designer. Name this class `Car` in the resulting dialog box. Now, using the Class Details window, add a public string field named `petName` (see Figure 2-26).

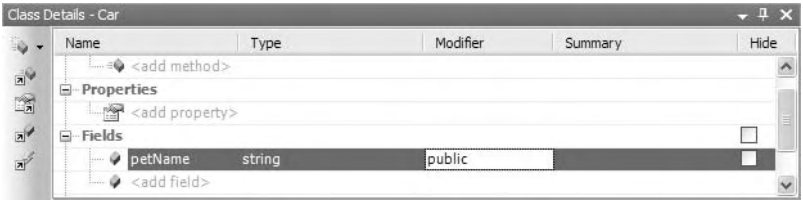


Figure 2-26. *Adding a field with the Class Details window*

If you now look at the C# definition of the `Car` class, you will see it has been updated accordingly:

```
public class Car
{
    // Public data is typically a bad idea; however,
    // it keeps this example simple.
    public string petName;
}
```

Add another new class to the designer named `SportsCar`. Now, select the Inheritance icon from the Class Designer Toolbox and click the top of the `SportsCar` icon. Without releasing the left mouse button, move the mouse on top of the `Car` class icon. If you performed these steps correctly, you have just derived the `SportsCar` class from `Car` (see Figure 2-27).

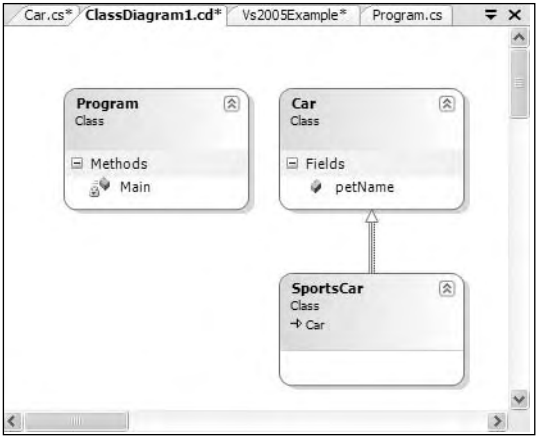


Figure 2-27. *Visually deriving from an existing class*

To complete this example, update the generated `SportsCar` class with a public method named `PrintPetName()` as follows:

```
public class SportsCar : Car
{
    public void PrintPetName()
    {
        petName = "Fred";
        Console.WriteLine("Name of this car is: {0}", petName);
    }
}
```

Object Test Bench

Another nice visual tool provided by Visual Studio 2005 is Object Test Bench (OTB). This aspect of the IDE allows you to quickly create an instance of a class and invoke its members without the need to compile and run the entire application. This can be extremely helpful when you wish to test a specific method, but would rather not step through dozens of lines of code to do so.

To work with OTB, right-click the type you wish to create using the Class Designer. For example, right-click the `SportsCar` type, and from the resulting context menu select Create Instance ➤ SportsCar(). This will display a dialog box that allows you to name your temporary object variable (and supply any constructor arguments if required). Once the process is complete, you will find your object hosted within the IDE. Right-click the object icon and invoke the `PrintPetName()` method (see Figure 2-28).

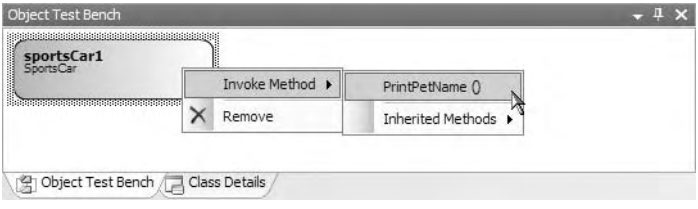


Figure 2-28. *The Visual Studio 2005 Object Test Bench*

You will see the message "Name of this car is: Fred" appear within the Visual Studio 2005 Quick Console.

The Integrated Help System

The final aspect of Visual Studio 2005 you *must* be comfortable with from the outset is the fully integrated help system. The .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation is extremely good, very readable, and full of useful information. Given the huge number of predefined .NET types (which number well into the thousands), you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and dig into the provided documentation. If you resist, you are doomed to a long, frustrating, and painful existence as a .NET developer.

Visual Studio 2005 provides the Dynamic Help window, which changes its contents (dynamically!) based on what item (window, menu, source code keyword, etc.) is currently selected. For

example, if you place the cursor on the `Console` class, the Dynamic Help window displays a set of links regarding the `System.Console` type.

You should also be aware of a very important subdirectory of the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation. Under the .NET Development ➤ .NET Framework SDK➤ Class Library Reference node of the documentation, you will find complete documentation of each and every namespace in the .NET base class libraries (see Figure 2-29).

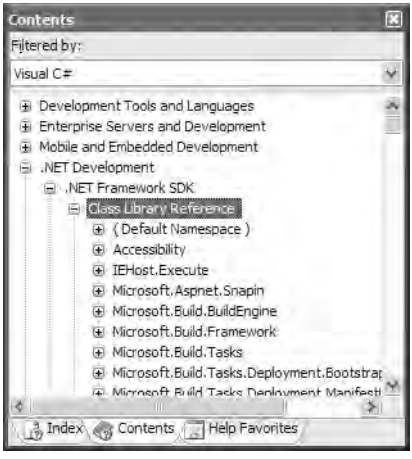


Figure 2-29. *The .NET base class library reference*

Each "book" defines the set of types in a given namespace, the members of a given type, and the parameters of a given member. Furthermore, when you view the help page for a given type, you will be told the name of the assembly and namespace that contains the type in question (located at the top of said page). As you read through the remainder of this book, I assume that you will dive into this *very, very* critical node to read up on additional details of the entity under examination.

A Partial Catalogue of Additional .NET Development Tools

To conclude this chapter, I would like to point out a number of .NET development tools that complement the functionality provided by your IDE of choice. Many of the tools mentioned here are open source, and all of them are free of charge. While I don't have the space to cover the details of these utilities, Table 2-5 lists a number of the tools I have found to be extremely helpful as well as URLs you can visit to find more information about them.

Table 2-5. *Select .NET Development Tools*

Tool	Meaning in Life	URL
FxCop	This is a must-have for any .NET developer interested in .NET best practices. FxCop will test any .NET assembly against the official Microsoft .NET best-practice coding guidelines.	`http://www.gotdotnet.com/team/fxcop`
Lutz Roeder's Reflector for .NET	This advanced .NET decompiler/object browser allows you to view the implementation of any .NET type using CIL, C#, Object Pascal .NET (Delphi), and Visual Basic .NET.	`http://www.aisto.com/roeder/dotnet`
NAnt	NAnt is the .NET equivalent of Ant, the popular Java automated build tool. NAnt allows you to define and execute detailed build scripts using an XML-based syntax.	`http://sourceforge.net/projects/nant`
NDoc	NDoc is a tool that will generate code documentation files for C# code (or a compiled .NET assembly) in a variety of popular formats (MSDN's `*.chm`, XML, HTML, Javadoc, and LaTeX).	`http://sourceforge.net/projects/ndoc`
NUnit	NUnit is the .NET equivalent of the Java-centric JUnit unit testing tool. Using NUnit, you are able to facilitate the testing of your managed code.	`http://www.nunit.org`
Vil	Think of Vil as a friendly "big brother" for .NET developers. This tool will analyze your .NET code and offer various opinions as to how to improve your code via refactoring, structured exception handling, and so forth.	`http://www.1bot.com`

■ **Note** The functionality of FxCop has now been integrated directly into Visual Studio 2005. To check it out, simply double-click the Properties icon within Solution Explorer and activate the Code Analysis tab.

Summary

So as you can see, you have many new toys at your disposal! The point of this chapter was to provide you with a tour of the major programming tools a C# programmer may leverage during the development process. You began the journey by learning how to generate .NET assemblies using nothing other than the free C# compiler and Notepad. Next, you were introduced to the TextPad application and walked though the process of enabling this tool to edit and compile `*.cs` code files.

You also examined three feature-rich IDEs, starting with the open source SharpDevelop, followed by Microsoft's Visual C# 2005 Express and Visual Studio 2005. While this chapter only scratched the surface of each tool's functionality, you should be in a good position to explore your chosen IDE at your leisure. The chapter wrapped up by examining a number of open source .NET development tools that extend the functionality of your IDE of choice.

PART 2



The C# Programming Language

CHAPTER 3

C# Language Fundamentals

Consider this chapter a potpourri of core topics regarding the C# language and the .NET platform. Unlike forthcoming chapters, there is no overriding example or theme; rather, the following pages illustrate a number of bite-size topics you must become comfortable with, including value-based and reference-based data types, decision and iteration constructs, boxing and unboxing mechanisms, the role of `System.Object`, and basic class-construction techniques. Along the way, you'll also learn how to manipulate CLR strings, arrays, enumerations, and structures using the syntax of C#.

To illustrate these language fundamentals, you'll take a programmatic look at the .NET base class libraries and build a number of sample applications, making use of various types in the `System` namespace. This chapter also examines a new C# 2005 language feature, nullable data types. Finally, you'll learn how to organize your types into custom namespaces using the C# `namespace` keyword.

The Anatomy of a Simple C# Program

C# demands that all program logic is contained within a type definition (recall from Chapter 1 that *type* is a term referring to a member of the set {class, interface, structure, enumeration, delegate}). Unlike in C(++), in C# it is not possible to create global functions or global points of data. In its simplest form, a C# program can be written as follows:

```
// By convention, C# files end with a *.cs file extension.
using System;

class HelloClass
{
     public static int Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Hello World!");
          Console.ReadLine();
          return 0;
     }
}
```

Here, a definition is created for a class type (`HelloClass`) that supports a single method named `Main()`. Every executable C# application must contain a class defining a `Main()` method, which is used to signify the entry point of the application. As you can see, this signature of `Main()` is adorned with the `public` and `static` keywords. Later in this chapter, you will be supplied with a formal definition of "public" and "static." Until then, understand that public members are accessible from other types, while static members are scoped at the class level (rather than the object level) and can thus be invoked without the need to first create a new class instance.

■ **Note** C# is a case-sensitive programming language. Therefore, "Main" is not the same as "main", and "Readline" is not the same as "ReadLine". Given this, be aware that all C# keywords are in lowercase (`public`, `lock`, `global`, and so on), while namespaces, types, and member names begin (by convention) with an initial capital letter and have capitalized any embedded words (e.g., `Console.WriteLine`, `System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox`, `System.Data.SqlClient`, and so on).

In addition to the `public` and `static` keywords, this `Main()` method has a single parameter, which happens to be an array of strings (`string[] args`). Although you are not currently bothering to process this array, this parameter may contain any number of incoming command-line arguments (you'll see how to access them momentarily).

The program logic of `HelloClass` is within `Main()` itself. Here, you make use of the `Console` class, which is defined within the `System` namespace. Among its set of members is the static `WriteLine()` which, as you might assume, pumps a text string to the standard output. You also make a call to `Console.ReadLine()` to ensure the command prompt launched by Visual Studio 2005 remains visible during a debugging session until you press the Enter key.

Because this `Main()` method has been defined as returning an integer data type, we return zero (success) before exiting. Finally, as you can see from the `HelloClass` type definition, C- and C++-style comments have carried over into the C# language.

Variations on the Main() Method

The previous iteration of `Main()` was defined to take a single parameter (an array of strings) and return an integer data type. This is not the only possible form of `Main()`, however. It is permissible to construct your application's entry point using any of the following signatures (assuming it is contained within a C# class or structure definition):

```
// No return type, array of strings as argument.
public static void Main(string[] args)
{
}

// No return type, no arguments.
public static void Main()
{
}

// Integer return type, no arguments.
public static int Main()
{
}
```

■ **Note** The `Main()` method may also be defined as `private` as opposed to `public`. Doing so ensures other assemblies cannot directly invoke an application's entry point. Visual Studio 2005 automatically defines a program's `Main()` method as private.

Obviously, your choice of how to construct `Main()` will be based on two questions. First, do you need to process any user-supplied command-line parameters? If so, they will be stored in the array of strings. Second, do you want to return a value to the system when `Main()` has completed? If so, you need to return an integer data type rather than `void`.

Processing Command-Line Arguments

Assume that you now wish to update `HelloClass` to process possible command-line parameters:

```
// This time, check if you have been sent any command-line arguments.
using System;

class HelloClass
{
     public static int Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Command line args *****");
          for(int i = 0; i < args.Length; i++)
               Console.WriteLine("Arg: {0} ", args[i]);
...
     }
}
```

Here, you are checking to see if the array of strings contains some number of items using the `Length` property of `System.Array` (as you'll see later in this chapter, all C# arrays actually alias the `System.Array` type, and therefore have a common set of members). As you loop over each item in the array, its value is printed to the console window. Supplying the arguments at the command line is equally as simple, as shown in Figure 3-1.



Figure 3-1. *Supplying arguments at the command line*

As an alternative to the standard `for` loop, you may iterate over incoming string arrays using the C# `foreach` keyword. This bit of syntax is fully explained later in this chapter, but here is some sample usage:

```
// Notice you have no need to check the size of the array when using 'foreach'.
public static int Main(string[] args)
{
...
     foreach(string s in args)
          Console.WriteLine("Arg: {0} ", s);
...
}
```

Finally, you are also able to access command-line arguments using the static `GetCommandLineArgs()` method of the `System.Environment` type. The return value of this method is an array of strings. The first index identifies the current directory containing the application itself, while the remaining elements in the array contain the individual command-line arguments (when using this technique, you no longer need to define the `Main()` method as taking a string array parameter):

```
public static int Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Get arguments using System.Environment.
    string[] theArgs = Environment.GetCommandLineArgs();
    Console.WriteLine("Path to this app is: {0}", theArgs[0]);
...
}
```

Specifying Command-Line Arguments with Visual Studio 2005

In the real world, the end user supplies the command-line arguments used by a given application when starting the program. However, during the development cycle, you may wish to specify possible command-line flags for testing purposes. To do so with Visual Studio 2005, double-click the Properties icon from Solution Explorer and select the Debug tab on the left side. From here, specify values using the "Command line arguments" text box (see Figure 3-2).

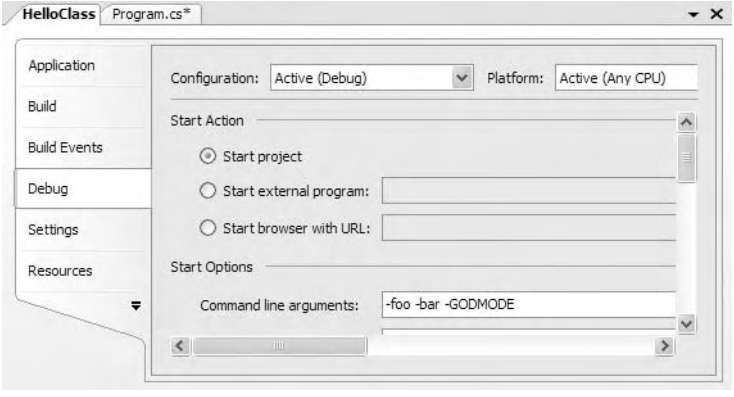


Figure 3-2. *Setting command arguments via Visual Studio 2005*

An Interesting Aside: The System.Environment Class

Let's examine the `System.Environment` class in greater detail. This class allows you to obtain a number of details regarding the operating system currently hosting your .NET application using various static members. To illustrate this class's usefulness, update your `Main()` method with the following logic:

```
public static int Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // OS running this app?
    Console.WriteLine("Current OS: {0} ", Environment.OSVersion);

    // Directory containing this app?
    Console.WriteLine("Current Directory: {0} ",
        Environment.CurrentDirectory);
```

```
    // List the drives on this machine.
    string[] drives = Environment.GetLogicalDrives();
    for(int i = 0; i < drives.Length; i++)
        Console.WriteLine("Drive {0}  : {1} ",  i, drives[i]);

    // Which version of the .NET platform is running this app?
    Console.WriteLine("Executing version of .NET: {0} ",
        Environment.Version);
...
}
```

Possible output can be seen in Figure 3-3.

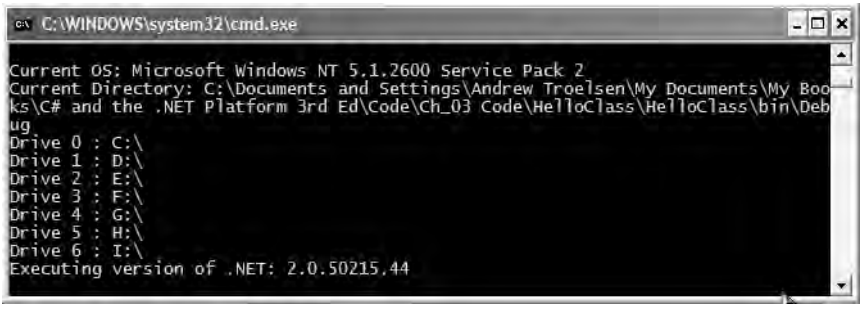

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
Current OS: Microsoft Windows NT 5.1.2600 Service Pack 2
Current Directory: C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Boo
ks\C# and the .NET Platform 3rd Ed\Code\Ch_03 Code\HelloClass\HelloClass\bin\Deb
ug
Drive 0 : C:\
Drive 1 : D:\
Drive 2 : E:\
Drive 3 : F:\
Drive 4 : G:\
Drive 5 : H:\
Drive 6 : I:\
Executing version of .NET: 2.0.50215.44

Figure 3-3. *Various environment variables at work*

The `System.Environment` type defines members other than those presented in the previous example. Table 3-1 documents some additional properties of interest; however, be sure to check out the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details.

Table 3-1. *Select Properties of* `System.Environment`

Property	Meaning in Life
`MachineName`	Gets the name of the current machine
`NewLine`	Gets the newline symbol for the current environment
`ProcessorCount`	Returns the number of processors on the current machine
`SystemDirectory`	Returns the full path to the system directory
`UserName`	Returns the name of the entity that started this application

Defining Classes and Creating Objects

Now that you have the role of `Main()` under your belt, let's move on to the topic of object construction. All object-oriented (OO) languages make a clear distinction between classes and objects. A *class* is a definition (or, if you will, a *blueprint*) for a user-defined type (UDT). An *object* is simply a term describing a given instance of a particular class in memory. In C#, the `new` keyword is the de facto way to create an object. Unlike other OO languages (such as C++), it is not possible to allocate a class type on the stack; therefore, if you attempt to use a class variable that has not been "new-ed," you are issued a compile-time error. Thus the following C# code is *illegal*:

```
using System;

class HelloClass
{
     public static int Main(string[] args)
     {
          // Error!  Use of unassigned local variable!  Must use 'new'.
          HelloClass c1;
          c1.SomeMethod();
...
     }
}
```

To illustrate the proper procedures for object creation, observe the following update:

```
using System;

class HelloClass
{
     public static int Main(string[] args)
     {
          // You can declare and create a new object in a single line...
          HelloClass c1 = new HelloClass();

          // ...or break declaration and creation into two lines.
          HelloClass c2;
          c2 = new HelloClass();
...
     }
}
```

The `new` keyword is in charge of calculating the correct number of bytes for the specified object and acquiring sufficient memory from the managed heap. Here, you have allocated two objects of the `HelloClass` class type. Understand that C# object variables are really a *reference* to the object in memory, not the actual object itself. Thus, in this light, `c1` and `c2` each reference a unique `HelloClass` object allocated on the managed heap.

The Role of Constructors

The previous `HelloClass` objects have been constructed using the *default constructor*, which by definition never takes arguments. Every C# class is automatically provided with a free default constructor, which you may redefine if need be. The default constructor ensures that all member data is set to an appropriate default value (this behavior is true for all constructors). Contrast this to C++, where uninitialized state data points to garbage (sometimes the little things mean a lot).

Typically, classes provide additional constructors beyond the default. In doing so, you provide the object user with a simple way to initialize the state of an object at the time of creation. Like in Java and C++, in C# constructors are named identically to the class they are constructing, and they never provide a return value (not even `void`). Here is the `HelloClass` type once again, with a custom constructor, a redefined default constructor, and a point of public string data:

```
// HelloClass, with constructors.
using System;

class HelloClass
{
     // A point of state data.
     public string userMessage;
```

```
    // Default constructor.
    public HelloClass()
    { Console.WriteLine("Default ctor called!"); }

    // This custom constructor assigns state data
    // to a user-supplied value.
    public HelloClass (string msg)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Custom ctor called!");
        userMessage = msg;
    }

    // Program entry point.
    public static int Main(string[] args)
    {
        // Call default constructor.
        HelloClass c1 = new HelloClass();
        Console.WriteLine("Value of userMessage: {0}\n", c1.userMessage);

       // Call parameterized constructor.
        HelloClass c2;
        c2 = new HelloClass("Testing, 1, 2, 3");
        Console.WriteLine("Value of userMessage: {0}", c2.userMessage);
        Console.ReadLine();
        return 0;
    }
}
```

■ **Note** Technically speaking, when a type defines identically named members (including constructors) that differ only in the number of—or type of—parameters, the member in question is *overloaded*. Chapter 4 examines member overloading in detail.

On examining the program's output, you can see that the default constructor has assigned the string field to its default value (empty), while the custom constructor has assigned the member data to the user-supplied value (see Figure 3-4).


C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\M...
Default ctor called!
Value of userMessage:
Custom ctor called!
Value of userMessage: Testing, 1, 2, 3

Figure 3-4. *Simple constructor logic*

■ **Note** As soon as you define a custom constructor for a class type, the free default constructor is removed. If you wish to allow your object users to create an instance of your type using the default constructor, you will need to explicitly redefine it as in the preceding example.

Is That a Memory Leak?

If you have a background in C++, you may be alarmed by the previous code samples. Specifically, notice how the `Main()` method of the previous `HelloClass` type has no logic that explicitly destroys the `c1` and `c2` references.

This is not a horrible omission, but the way of .NET. Like Visual Basic and Java developers, C# programmers never explicitly destroy a managed object. The .NET garbage collector frees the allocated memory automatically, and therefore C# does not support a `delete` keyword. Chapter 5 examines the garbage collection process in more detail. Until then, just remember that the .NET runtime environment automatically destroys the managed objects you allocate.

Defining an "Application Object"

Currently, the `HelloClass` type has been constructed to perform two duties. First, the class defines the entry point of the application (the `Main()` method). Second, `HelloClass` maintains a point of field data and a few constructors. While this is all well and good, it may seem a bit strange (although syntactically well-formed) that the static `Main()` method creates an instance of the very class in which it was defined:

```
class HelloClass
{
...
     public static int Main(string[] args)
     {
          HelloClass c1 = new HelloClass();
          ...
     }
}
```

Many of my initial examples take this approach, just to keep focused on illustrating the task at hand. However, a more natural design would be to refactor the current `HelloClass` type into two distinct classes: `HelloClass` and `HelloApp`. When you build C# applications, it becomes quite common to have one type functioning as the "application object" (the type that defines the `Main()` method) and numerous other types that constitute the application at large.

In OO parlance, this is termed the *separation of concerns*. In a nutshell, this design principle states that a class should be responsible for the least amount of work. Thus, we could reengineer the current program into the following (notice that a new member named `PrintMessage()` has been added to the `HelloClass` type):

```
class HelloClass
{
     public string userMessage;

     public HelloClass()
     { Console.WriteLine("Default ctor called!"); }

     public HelloClass(string msg)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Custom ctor called!");
          userMessage = msg;
     }

     public void PrintMessage()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Message is: {0}", userMessage);
     }
}
```

```
class HelloApp
{
     public static int Main(string[] args)
     {
          HelloClass c1 = new HelloClass("Hey there...");
          c1.PrintMessage();
...
     }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The HelloClass project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

The System.Console Class

Many of the example applications created over the course of these first few chapters make extensive use of the `System.Console` class. While a console user interface (CUI) is not as enticing as a Windows or web UI, restricting the early examples to a CUI will allow us to keep focused on the concepts under examination, rather than dealing with the complexities of building GUIs.

As its name implies, the `Console` class encapsulates input, output, and error stream manipulations for console-based applications. With the release of .NET 2.0, the `Console` type has been enhanced with additional functionality. Table 3-2 lists some (but not all) new members of interest.

Table 3-2. *Select .NET 2.0–Specific Members of* `System.Console`

Member	Meaning in Life
`BackgroundColor` `ForegroundColor`	These properties set the background/foreground colors for the current output. They may be assigned any member of the `ConsoleColor` enumeration.
`BufferHeight` `BufferWidth`	These properties control the height/width of the console's buffer area.
`Clear()`	This method clears the buffer and console display area.
`Title`	This property sets the title of the current console.

`WindowHeight`
`WindowWidth`
`WindowTop`
`WindowLeft`
	These properties control the dimensions of the console in relation to the established buffer.

Basic Input and Output with the Console Class

In addition to the members in Table 3-2, the `Console` type defines a set of methods to capture input and output, all of which are defined as static and are therefore called at the class level. As you have seen, `WriteLine()` pumps a text string (including a carriage return) to the output stream. The `Write()` method pumps text to the output stream without a carriage return. `ReadLine()` allows you to receive information from the input stream up until the carriage return, while `Read()` is used to capture a single character from the input stream.

To illustrate basic I/O using the `Console` class, consider the following `Main()` method, which prompts the user for some bits of information and echoes each item to the standard output stream. Figure 3-5 shows a test run.

```
// Make use of the Console class to perform basic I/O.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Echo some stats.
     Console.Write("Enter your name: ");
     string s = Console.ReadLine();
     Console.WriteLine("Hello, {0} ", s);

     Console.Write("Enter your age: ");
     s = Console.ReadLine();
     Console.WriteLine("You are {0} years old", s);
}
```



Figure 3-5. *Basic I/O using* `System.Console`

Formatting Console Output

During these first few chapters, you have seen numerous occurrences of the tokens `{0}`, `{1}`, and the like embedded within a string literal. .NET introduces a new style of string formatting, slightly reminiscent of the C `printf()` function, but without the cryptic `%d`, `%s`, or `%c` flags. A simple example follows (see the output in Figure 3-6):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     int theInt = 90;
     double theDouble = 9.99;
     bool theBool = true;

     // The '\n' token in a string literal inserts a newline.
     Console.WriteLine("Int is: {0}\nDouble is: {1}\nBool is: {2}",
          theInt, theDouble, theBool);
}
```

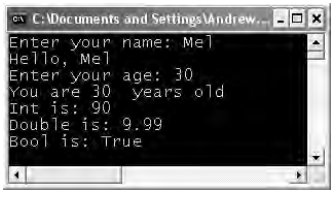


Figure 3-6. *Multiple string literal placeholders*

The first parameter to `WriteLine()` represents a string literal that contains optional placeholders designated by `{0}`, `{1}`, `{2}`, and so forth (curly bracket numbering always begins with zero). The remaining parameters to `WriteLine()` are simply the values to be inserted into the respective placeholders (in this case, an `int`, a `double`, and a `bool`).

Also be aware that `WriteLine()` has been overloaded to allow you to specify placeholder values as an array of objects. Thus, you can represent any number of items to be plugged into the format string as follows:

```
// Fill placeholders using an array of objects.
object[] stuff =  {"Hello", 20.9, 1, "There", "83", 99.99933} ;
Console.WriteLine("The Stuff: {0} , {1} , {2} , {3} , {4} , {5} ", stuff);
```

It is also permissible for a given placeholder to repeat within a given string. For example, if you are a Beatles fan and want to build the string "`9, Number 9, Number 9`" you would write

```
// John says...
Console.WriteLine("{0}, Number {0}, Number {0}", 9);
```

■ **Note** If you have a mismatch between the number of uniquely numbered curly-bracket placeholders and fill arguments, you will receive a `FormatException` exception at runtime.

.NET String Formatting Flags

If you require more elaborate formatting, each placeholder can optionally contain various format characters (in either uppercase or lowercase), as seen in Table 3-3.

Table 3-3. *.NET String Format Characters*

String Format Character	Meaning in Life
`C` or `c`	Used to format currency. By default, the flag will prefix the local cultural symbol (a dollar sign [$] for U.S. English).
`D` or `d`	Used to format decimal numbers. This flag may also specify the minimum number of digits used to pad the value.
`E` or `e`	Used for exponential notation.
`F` or `f`	Used for fixed-point formatting.
`G` or `g`	Stands for *general*. This character can be used to format a number to fixed or exponential format.
`N` or `n`	Used for basic numerical formatting (with commas).
`X` or `x`	Used for hexadecimal formatting. If you use an uppercase X, your hex format will also contain uppercase characters.

These format characters are suffixed to a given placeholder value using the colon token (e.g., `{0:C}`, `{1:d}`, `{2:X}`, and so on). Assume you have updated `Main()` with the following logic:

```
// Now make use of some format tags.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     Console.WriteLine("C format: {0:C}", 99989.987);
     Console.WriteLine("D9 format: {0:D9}", 99999);
     Console.WriteLine("E format: {0:E}", 99999.76543);
     Console.WriteLine("F3 format: {0:F3}", 99999.9999);
```

```
    Console.WriteLine("N format: {0:N}", 99999);
    Console.WriteLine("X format: {0:X}", 99999);
    Console.WriteLine("x format: {0:x}", 99999);
}
```

Be aware that the use of .NET formatting characters is not limited to console applications. These same flags can be used within the context of the static `String.Format()` method. This can be helpful when you need to build a string containing numerical values in memory for use in any application type (Windows Forms, ASP.NET, XML web services, and so on):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Use the static String.Format() method to build a new string.
    string formatStr;
    formatStr =
        String.Format("Don't you wish you had {0:C} in your account?",
         99989.987);
    Console.WriteLine(formatStr);
}
```

Figure 3-7 shows a test run.

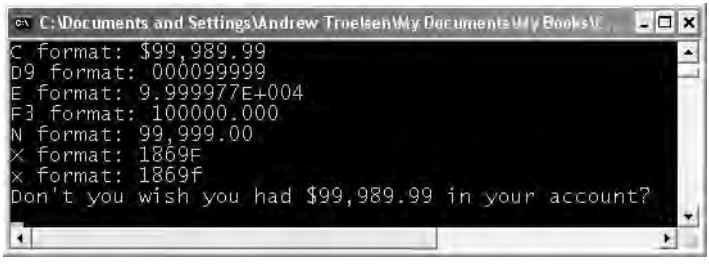

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Books\C...
C format: $99,989.99
D9 format: 000099999
E format: 9.999977E+004
F3 format: 100000.000
N format: 99,999.00
X format: 1869F
x format: 1869f
Don't you wish you had $99,989.99 in your account?

Figure 3-7. *String format flags in action*

■ **Source Code** The BasicConsoleIO project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Establishing Member Visibility

Before we go much further, it is important to address the topic of *member visibility*. Members (methods, fields, constructors, and so on) of a given class or structure must specify their "visibility" level. If you define a member without specifying an accessibility keyword, it automatically defaults to `private`. C# offers the method access modifiers shown in Table 3-4.

Table 3-4. *C# Accessibility Keywords*

C# Access Modifier	Meaning in Life
`public`	Marks a member as accessible from an object variable as well as any derived classes.
`private`	Marks a method as accessible only by the class that has defined the method. In C#, all members are private by default.
`protected`	Marks a method as usable by the defining class, as well as any derived classes. Protected methods, however, are not accessible from an object variable.
`internal`	Defines a method that is accessible by any type in the same assembly, but not outside the assembly.
`protected internal`	Defines a method whose access is limited to the current assembly or types derived from the defining class in the current assembly.

As you may already know, members that are declared public are directly accessible from an object reference via the dot operator (`.`). Private members cannot be accessed by an object reference, but instead are called internally by the object to help the instance get its work done (i.e., private helper functions).

Protected members are only truly useful when you create class hierarchies, which is the subject of Chapter 4. As far as internal or internal protected members are concerned, they are only truly useful when you are creating .NET code libraries (such as a managed `*.dll`, a topic examined in Chapter 11).

To illustrate the implications of these keywords, assume you have created a class (`SomeClass`) using each of the possible member access modifiers:

```
// Member visibility options.
class SomeClass
{
    // Accessible anywhere.
    public void PublicMethod(){}

    // Accessible only from SomeClass types.
    private void PrivateMethod(){}

    // Accessible from SomeClass and any descendent.
    protected void ProtectedMethod(){}

    // Accessible from within the same assembly.
    internal void InternalMethod(){}

    // Assembly-protected access.
    protected internal void ProtectedInternalMethod(){}

    // Unmarked members are private by default in C#.
    void SomeMethod(){}
}
```

Now assume you have created an instance of `SomeClass` and attempt to invoke each method using the dot operator:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Make an object and attempt to call members.
    SomeClass c = new SomeClass();
    c.PublicMethod();
```

```
    c.InternalMethod();
    c.ProtectedInternalMethod();
    c.PrivateMethod();        // Error!
    c.ProtectedMethod();      // Error!
    c.SomeMethod();           // Error!
}
```

If you compile this program, you will find that the protected and private members are *not* accessible from an object.

■ **Source Code** The MemberAccess project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Establishing Type Visibility

Types (classes, interfaces, structures, enumerations, and delegates) can also take accessibility modifiers, but are limited to `public` or `internal`. When you create a public type, you ensure that the type can be accessed from other types in the current assembly as well as external assemblies. Again, this is useful only when you are creating a code library (see Chapter 11); however, here is some example usage:

```
// This type can be used by any assembly.
public class MyClass{}
```

An internal type, on the other hand, can be used only by the assembly in which it is defined. Thus, if you created a .NET code library that defines three internal types, assemblies that reference the `*.dll` would not be able to see, create, or in anyway interact with them.

Because internal is the default accessibility for types in C#, if you do not specifically make use of the `public` keyword, you actually create an internal type:

```
// These classes can only be used by the defining assembly.
internal class MyHelperClass{}
class FinalHelperClass{}          // Types are internal by default in C#.
```

■ **Note** In Chapter 4 you'll learn about nested types. As you'll see, nested types can be declared private as well.

Default Values of Class Member Variables

The member variables of class types are automatically set to an appropriate default value. This value will differ based on the exact data type; however, the rules are simple:

- `bool` types are set to false.
- Numeric data is set to 0 (or 0.0 in the case of floating-point data types).
- `string` types are set to null.
- `char` types are set to `'\0'`.
- Reference types are set to null.

Given these rules, ponder the following code:

```
// Fields of a class type receive automatic default assignments.
class Test
{
    public int myInt;          // Set to 0.
```

```
    public string myString;    // Set to null.
    public bool myBool;        // Set to false.
    public object myObj;       // Set to null.
}
```

Default Values and Local Variables

The story is very different, however, when you declare local variables within a member scope. When you define local variables, you *must* assign an initial value before you use them, as they do not receive a default assignment. For example, the following code results in a compiler error:

```
// Compiler error! Must assign 'localInt' to an initial value before use.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    int localInt;
    Console.WriteLine(localInt);
}
```

Fixing the problem is trivial. Simply make an initial assignment:

```
// Better; everyone is happy.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    int localInt = 0;
    Console.WriteLine(localInt);
}
```

■ **Note** There's one exception to the mandatory assignment of local variables. If the variable is used as an *output parameter* (you'll examine this a bit later in this chapter), the variable doesn't need to be assigned an initial value.

Member Variable Initialization Syntax

Class types tend to have numerous member variables (aka fields). Given that a class may define multiple constructors, you can find yourself in the annoying position of having to write the same initialization code in each and every constructor implementation. This is particularly true if you do not wish to accept the member's default value. For example, if you wish to ensure that an integer member variable (`myInt`) always begins life with the value of 9, you could write

```
// This is OK, but redundant...
class Test
{
    public int myInt;
    public string myString;

    public Test() { myInt = 9; }
    public Test(string s)
    {
        myInt = 9;
        myString = s;
    }
}
```

An alternative would be to define a private helper function for your class type that is called by each constructor. While this will reduce the amount of repeat *assignment* code, you are now stuck with the following redundancy:

```
// This is still rather redundant...
class Test
{
     public int myInt;
     public string myString;

     public Test() { InitData(); }
     public Test(string s)
     {
          myString = s;
          InitData();
     }

     private void InitData()
     { myInt = 9; }
}
```

While both of these techniques are still valid, C# allows you to assign a type's member data to an initial value at the time of declaration (as you may be aware, other OO languages [such as C++] do not allow you to initialize a member in this way). Notice in the following code blurb that member initialization may be used with internal object references as well as numerical data types:

```
// This technique is useful when you don't want to accept default values
// and would rather not write the same initialization code in each constructor.
class Test
{
     public int myInt = 9;
     public string myStr = "My initial value.";
     public SportsCar viper = new SportsCar(Color.Red);
     ...
}
```

■ **Note** Member assignment happens *before* constructor logic. Thus, if you assign a field within the scope of a constructor, it effectively cancels out the previous member assignment.

Defining Constant Data

Now that you have seen how to declare class variables, let's see how to define data that should never be reassigned. C# offers the `const` keyword to define variables with a fixed, unalterable value. Once the value of a constant has been established, any attempt to alter it results in a compiler error. Unlike in C++, in C# the `const` keyword cannot be used to qualify parameters or return values, and is reserved for the creation of local or instance-level data.

It is important to understand that the value assigned to a constant variable must be known at *compile time*, and therefore a constant member cannot be assigned to an object reference (whose value is computed at runtime). To illustrate the use of the `const` keyword, assume the following class type:

```
class ConstData
{
     // The value assigned to a const must be known
     // at compile time.
     public const string BestNbaTeam = "Timberwolves";
     public const double SimplePI = 3.14;
     public const bool Truth = true;
     public const bool Falsity = !Truth;
}
```

Notice that the value of each constant is known at the time of compilation. In fact, if you were to view these constants using `ildasm.exe`, you would find the value hard-coded directly into the assembly, as shown in Figure 3-8. (You can't get much more constant than this!)

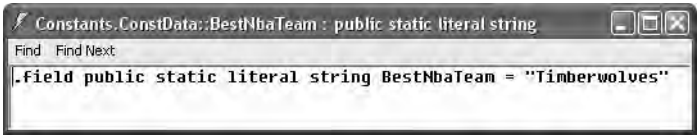

Constants.ConstData::BestNbaTeam : public static literal string
Find Find Next
.field public static literal string BestNbaTeam = "Timberwolves"

Figure 3-8. *The* `const` *keyword hard-codes its value into the assembly metadata.*

Referencing Constant Data

When you wish to reference a constant defined by an external type, you must prefix the defining type name (e.g., `ConstData.Truth`), as constant fields are *implicitly static*. However, if you are referencing a piece of constant data defined in the current type (or within the current member), you are not required to prefix the type name. To solidify these points, observe the following additional class:

```
class Program
{
    public const string BestNhlTeam = "Wild";

    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        // Print const values defined by other type.
        Console.WriteLine("Nba const: {0}", ConstData.BestNbaTeam);
        Console.WriteLine("SimplePI const: {0}", ConstData.SimplePI);
        Console.WriteLine("Truth const: {0}", ConstData.Truth);
        Console.WriteLine("Falsity const: {0}", ConstData.Falsity);

        // Print member-level const.
        Console.WriteLine("Nhl const: {0}", BestNhlTeam);

        // Print local-scoped const.
        const int LocalFixedValue = 4;
        Console.WriteLine("Local const: {0}", LocalFixedValue);
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Notice that when the `Program` class accesses the constants within `ConstData`, the type name must be specified. However, `Program` has direct access to the `BestNhlTeam` constant as it was defined within its own class scope. The `LocalFixedValue` constant defined within `Main()` would, of course, be accessible only from the `Main()` method.

■ **Source Code** The Constants project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Defining Read-Only Fields

As mentioned earlier, the value assigned to a constant must be known at compile time. However, what if you wish to create an unchangeable field whose initial value is not known until *runtime*? Assume you have created a class named `Tire`, which maintains a manufacture ID. Furthermore, assume you wish to configure this class type to maintain a pair of well-known `Tire` instances whose value should never change. If you use the `const` keyword, you will receive compiler errors, given that the address of an object in memory is not known until *runtime*:

```
class Tire
{
     // Given that the address of objects is determined at
     // runtime, we cannot use the 'const' keyword here!
     public const Tire GoodStone = new Tire(90);    // Error!
     public const Tire FireYear = new Tire(100);    // Error!

     public int manufactureID;
     public Tire() {}
     public Tire(int ID)
     { manufactureID = ID; }
}
```

Read-only fields allow you to establish a point of data whose value is not known at compile time, but that should never change once established. To define a read-only field, make use of the C# `readonly` keyword:

```
class Tire
{
     public readonly Tire GoodStone = new Tire(90);
     public readonly Tire FireYear = new Tire(100);

     public int manufactureID;
     public Tire() {}
     public Tire(int ID)
     { manufactureID = ID; }
}
```

With this update, you not only compile, but also ensure that if the `GoodStone` or `FireYear` fields are changed within your program, you receive a compilation error:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Error!  Can't change the value of a read-only field.
     Tire t = new Tire();
     t.FireYear = new Tire(33);
}
```

Read-only fields have another distinction from constant data: their value may be assigned within the scope of a constructor. This can be very useful if the value to assign to a read-only field must be read from an external source (such as a text file or database). Assume another class named `Employee`, which defines a read-only string representing a U.S. Social Security number (SSN). To ensure the object user can specify this value, you may author the following code:

```
class Employee
{
    public readonly string SSN;
```

```
    public Employee(string empSSN)
    {
        SSN = empSSN;
    }
}
```

Again, because SSN is readonly, any attempt to change this value after the constructor logic results in a compiler error:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Employee e = new Employee("111-22-1111");
     e.SSN = "222-22-2222";  // Error!
}
```

Static Read-Only Fields

Unlike constant data, read-only fields are not implicitly static. If you wish to allow object users to obtain the value of a read-only field from the class level, simply make use of the static keyword:

```
class Tire
{
     public static readonly Tire GoodStone = new Tire(90);
     public static readonly Tire FireYear = new Tire(100);
...
}
```

Here is an example of working with the new Tire type:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Tire myTire = Tire.FireYear;
     Console.WriteLine("ID of my tire is: {0}", myTire.manufactureID);
}
```

■ **Source Code** The ReadOnlyFields project is included under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Understanding the static Keyword

As shown throughout this chapter, C# class (and structure) members may be defined using the static keyword. When you do so, the member in question must be invoked directly from the class level, rather than from a type instance. To illustrate the distinction, consider our good friend System.Console. As you have seen, you do not invoke the WriteLine() method from the object level:

```
// Error!  WriteLine() is not an instance level method!
Console c = new Console();
c.WriteLine("I can't be printed...");
```

but instead simply prefix the type name to the static WriteLine() member:

```
// Correct!  WriteLine() is a static method.
Console.WriteLine("Thanks...");
```

Simply put, static members are items that are deemed (by the type designer) to be so commonplace that there is no need to create an instance of the type. When you are designing custom class types, you are also able to define any number of static and/or instance-level members.

Static Methods

Assume a class named `Teenager` that defines a static method named `Complain()`, which returns a random string, obtained in part by calling a private helper function named `GetRandomNumber()`:

```
class Teenager
{
     private static Random r = new Random();
     private static int GetRandomNumber(short upperLimit)
     { return r.Next(upperLimit); }

     public static string Complain()
     {
          string[] messages = new string[5]{  "Do I have to?",
               "He started it!", "I'm too tired...",
               "I hate school!", "You are sooo wrong." } ;
          return messages[GetRandomNumber(5)];
     }
}
```

Notice that the `System.Random` member variable and the `GetRandomNumber()` helper function method have also been declared as static members of the `Teenager` class, given the rule that static members can operate *only* on other static members.

■ **Note** Allow me to repeat myself. *Static members can operate* only *on static class members*. If you attempt to make use of nonstatic class members (also called *instance data*) within a static method, you receive a compiler error.

Like any static member, to call `Complain()`, prefix the name of the defining class:

```
// Call the static Complain method of the Teenager class.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
          Console.WriteLine("-> {0}", Teenager.Complain());
}
```

And like any nonstatic method, if the `Complain()` method was *not* marked static, you would need to create an instance of the `Teenager` class before you could hear about the gripe of the day:

```
// Nonstatic data must be invoked at the object level.
Teenager joe = new Teenager();
joe.Complain();
```

■ **Source Code** The StaticMethods application is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Static Data

In addition to static methods, a type may also define static data (such as the `Random` member variable seen in the previous `Teenager` class). Understand that when a class defines nonstatic data, each object of this type maintains a private copy of the field. For example, assume a class that models a savings account:

```
// This class has a single piece of nonstatic data.
class SavingsAccount
{
     public double currBalance;
     public SavingsAccount(double balance)
     { currBalance = balance;}
}
```

When you create `SavingsAccount` objects, memory for the `currBalance` field is allocated for each instance. Static data, on the other hand, is allocated once and shared among all object instances of the same type. To illustrate the usefulness of static data, assume you add piece of *static* data named `currInterestRate` to the `SavingsAccount` class:

```
class SavingsAccount
{
     public double currBalance;
     public static double currInterestRate = 0.04;
     public SavingsAccount(double balance)
     { currBalance = balance;}
}
```

If you were to create three instances of `SavingsAccount` as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Each SavingsAccount object maintains a copy of the currBalance field.
     SavingsAccount s1 = new SavingsAccount(50);
     SavingsAccount s2 = new SavingsAccount(100);
     SavingsAccount s3 = new SavingsAccount(10000.75);
}
```

the in-memory data allocation would look something like Figure 3-9.

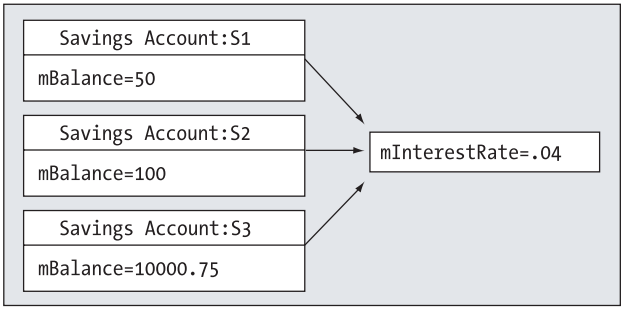


Figure 3-9. *Static data is shared for all instances of the defining class.*

Let's update the `SavingsAccount` class to define two static methods to get and set the interest rate value. As stated, static methods can operate only on static data. However, a nonstatic method can make use of both static and nonstatic data. This should make sense, given that static data is available to all instances of the type. Given this, let's also add two instance-level methods to interact with the interest rate variable:

```
class SavingsAccount
{
     public double currBalance;
     public static double currInterestRate = 0.04;
     public SavingsAccount(double balance)
     { currBalance = balance;}

     // Static methods to get/set interest rate.
     public static SetInterestRate(double newRate)
     { currInterestRate = newRate;}

     public static double GetInterestRate()
     { return currInterestRate;}

     // Instance method to get/set current interest rate.
     public void SetInterestRateObj(double newRate)
     { currInterestRate = newRate;}

     public double GetInterestRateObj()
     { return currInterestRate;}
}
```

Now, observe the following usage and the output in Figure 3-10:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Static Data *****");
     SavingsAccount s1 = new SavingsAccount(50);
     SavingsAccount s2 = new SavingsAccount(100);

     // Get and set interest rate.
     Console.WriteLine("Interest Rate is: {0}", s1.GetInterestRateObj());
     s2.SetInterestRateObj(0.08);

     // Make new object, this does NOT 'reset' the interest rate.
     SavingsAccount s3 = new SavingsAccount(10000.75);
     Console.WriteLine("Interest Rate is: {0}", SavingsAccount.GetInterestRate());
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

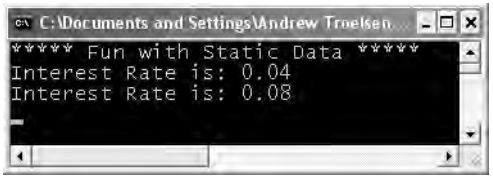


Figure 3-10. *Static data is allocated only once.*

Static Constructors

As you know, constructors are used to set the value of a type's data at the time of construction. If you were to assign the value to a piece of static data within an instance-level constructor, you would be saddened to find that the value is reset each time you create a new object! For example, assume you have updated the `SavingsAccount` class as so:

```
class SavingsAccount
{
     public double currBalance;
     public static double currInterestRate;
     public SavingsAccount(double balance)
     {
          currBalance = balance;
          currInterestRate = 0.04;
     }
...
}
```

If you execute the previous `Main()` method, you will see a very different output (see Figure 3-11). Specifically notice how the `currInterestRate` variable is reset each time you create a new `SavingsAccount` object.

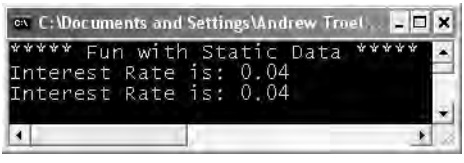


Figure 3-11. *Assigning static data in a constructor "resets" the value.*

While you are always free to establish the initial value of static data using the member initialization syntax, what if the value for your static data needed to be obtained from a database or external file? To perform such tasks requires a method scope to author the code statements. For this very reason, C# allows you to define a *static constructor*:

```
class SavingsAccount
{
...
     // Static constructor.
     static SavingsAccount()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("In static ctor!");
          currInterestRate = 0.04;
     }
}
```

Here are a few points of interest regarding static constructors:

- A given class (or structure) may define only a single static constructor.
- A static constructor executes exactly one time, regardless of how many objects of the type are created.
- A static constructor does not take an access modifier and cannot take any parameters.
- The runtime invokes the static constructor when it creates an instance of the class or before accessing the first static member invoked by the caller.
- The static constructor executes before any instance-level constructors.

Given this modification, when you create new `SavingsAccount` objects, the value of the static data is preserved, and the output is identical to Figure 3-10.

Static Classes

C# 2005 has widened the scope of the `static` keyword by introducing *static classes*. When a class has been defined as static, it is not creatable using the `new` keyword, and it can contain only static members or fields (if this is not the case, you receive compiler errors).

At first glance, this might seem like a very *useless* feature, given that a class that cannot be created does not appear all that helpful. However, if you create a class that contains nothing but static members and/or constant data, the class has no need to be allocated in the first place. Consider the following type:

```
// Static classes can only
// contain static members and constant fields.
static class UtilityClass
{
     public static void PrintTime()
     { Console.WriteLine(DateTime.Now.ToShortTimeString()); }
     public static void PrintDate()
     { Console.WriteLine(DateTime.Today.ToShortDateString()); }
}
```

Given the static modifier, object users cannot create an instance of `UtilityClass`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     UtilityClass.PrintDate();

     // Compiler error! Can't create static classes.
     UtilityClass u = new UtilityClass();
...
}
```

Prior to C# 2005, the only way to prevent an object user from creating such a type was to either redefine the default constructor as private or mark the class as an abstract type using the C# `abstract` keyword (full details regarding abstract types are in Chapter 4):

```
class UtilityClass
{
     private UtilityClass(){}
...
}

abstract class UtilityClass
{
...
}
```

While these constructs are still permissible, the use of static classes is a cleaner solution and more type-safe, given that the previous two techniques allowed nonstatic members to appear within the class definition.

■ **Source Code** The StaticData project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Method Parameter Modifiers

Methods (static and instance level) tend to take parameters passed in by the caller. However, unlike some programming languages, C# provides a set of parameter modifiers that control how arguments are sent into (and possibly returned from) a given method, as shown in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5. *C# Parameter Modifiers*

Parameter Modifier	Meaning in Life
(none)	If a parameter is not marked with a parameter modifier, it is assumed to be *passed by value,* meaning the called method receives a copy of the original data.
`out`	Output parameters are assigned by the method being called (and therefore *passed by reference*). If the called method fails to assign output parameters, you are issued a compiler error.
`params`	This parameter modifier allows you to send in a variable number of identically typed arguments as a single logical parameter. A method can have only a single `params` modifier, and it must be the final parameter of the method.
`ref`	The value is initially assigned by the caller, and may be *optionally* reassigned by the called method (as the data is also passed by reference). No compiler error is generated if the called method fails to assign a `ref` parameter.

The Default Parameter-Passing Behavior

The default manner in which a parameter is sent into a function is *by value*. Simply put, if you do not mark an argument with a parameter-centric modifier, a copy of the variable is passed into the function:

```
// Arguments are passed by value by default.
public static int Add(int x, int y)
{
    int ans = x + y;

    // Caller will not see these changes
    // as you are modifying a copy of the
    // original data.
    x = 10000;
    y = 88888;
    return ans;
}
```

Here, the incoming integer parameters will be passed by value. Therefore, if you change the values of the parameters within the scope of the member, the caller is blissfully unaware, given that you are changing the values of copies of the caller's integer data types:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     int x = 9, y = 10;
     Console.WriteLine("Before call: X: {0}, Y: {1}", x, y);
     Console.WriteLine("Answer is: {0}", Add(x, y));
     Console.WriteLine("After call: X: {0}, Y: {1}", x, y);
}
```

As you would hope, the values of `x` and `y` remain identical before and after the call to `Add()`.

The out Modifier

Next, we have the use of *output* parameters. Methods that have been defined to take output parameters are under obligation to assign them to an appropriate value before exiting the method in question (if you fail to ensure this, you will receive compiler errors).

To illustrate, here is an alternative version of the `Add()` method that returns the sum of two integers using the C# `out` modifier (note the physical return value of this method is now `void`):

```
// Output parameters are allocated by the member.
public static void Add(int x, int y, out int ans)
{
    ans = x + y;
}
```

Calling a method with output parameters also requires the use of the `out` modifier. Recall that local variables passed as output variables are not required to be assigned before use (if you do so, the original value is lost after the call), for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // No need to assign local output variables.
     int ans;
     Add(90, 90, out ans);
     Console.WriteLine("90 + 90 = {0} ", ans);
}
```

The previous example is intended to be illustrative in nature; you really have no reason to return the value of your summation using an output parameter. However, the C# `out` modifier does serve a very useful purpose: it allows the caller to obtain multiple return values from a single method invocation.

```
// Returning multiple output parameters.
public static void FillTheseValues(out int a, out string b, out bool c)
{
    a = 9;
    b = "Enjoy your string.";
    c = true;
}
```

The caller would be able to invoke the following method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     int i;
     string str;
     bool b;

     FillTheseValues(out i, out str, out b);
     Console.WriteLine("Int is: {0}", i);
     Console.WriteLine("String is: {0}", str);
     Console.WriteLine("Boolean is: {0}", b);
}
```

The ref Modifier

Now consider the use of the C# `ref` parameter modifier. Reference parameters are necessary when you wish to allow a method to operate on (and usually change the values of) various data points declared in the caller's scope (such as a sorting or swapping routine). Note the distinction between output and reference parameters:

- Output parameters do not need to be initialized before they passed to the method. The reason for this? The method must assign output parameters before exiting.
- Reference parameters *must* be initialized before they are passed to the method. The reason for this? You are passing a reference to an existing variable. If you don't assign it to an initial value, that would be the equivalent of operating on an unassigned local variable.

Let's check out the use of the `ref` keyword by way of a method that swaps two strings:

```
// Reference parameter.
public static void SwapStrings(ref string s1, ref string s2)
{
     string tempStr = s1;
     s1 = s2;
     s2 = tempStr;
}
```

This method can be called as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     string s = "First string";
     string s2 = "My other string";
     Console.WriteLine("Before: {0}, {1} ", s, s2);
     SwapStrings(ref s, ref s2);
     Console.WriteLine("After: {0}, {1} ", s, s2);
}
```

Here, the caller has assigned an initial value to local string data (`s` and `s2`). Once the call to `SwapStrings()` returns, `s` now contains the value `"My other string"`, while `s2` reports the value `"First string"`.

The params Modifier

The final parameter modifier is the `params` modifier, which allows you to create a method that may be sent to a set of identically typed arguments *as a single logical parameter*. Yes, this can be confusing. To clear the air, assume a method that returns the average of any number of doubles:

```
// Return average of 'some number' of doubles.
static double CalculateAverage(params double[] values)
{
    double sum = 0;
    for (int i = 0; i < values.Length; i++)
        sum += values[i];
    return (sum / values.Length);
}
```

This method has been defined to take a parameter array of doubles. What this method is in fact saying is, "Send me *any number of doubles* and I'll compute the average." Given this, you can call `CalculateAverage()` in any of the following ways (if you did not make use of the `params` modifier in the definition of `CalculateAverage()`, the first invocation of this method would result in a compiler error):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Pass in a comma-delimited list of doubles...
    double average;
    average = CalculateAverage(4.0, 3.2, 5.7);
    Console.WriteLine("Average of 4.0, 3.2, 5.7 is: {0}",
        average);
```

```
    // ...or pass an array of doubles.
    double[] data = { 4.0, 3.2, 5.7 };
    average = CalculateAverage(data);
    Console.WriteLine("Average of data is: {0}", average);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

That wraps up our initial look at parameter modifiers. We'll revisit this topic later in the chapter when we examine the distinction between value types and reference types. Next up, let's check out the iteration and decision constructions of the C# programming language.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleParams project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Iteration Constructs

All programming languages provide ways to repeat blocks of code until a terminating condition has been met. Regardless of which language you have used in the past, the C# iteration statements should not raise too many eyebrows and should require little explanation. C# provides the following four iteration constructs:

- `for` loop
- `foreach/in` loop
- `while` loop
- `do/while` loop

Let's quickly examine each looping construct in turn.

The for Loop

When you need to iterate over a block of code a fixed number of times, the `for` statement is the construct of champions. In essence, you are able to specify how many times a block of code repeats itself, as well as the terminating condition. Without belaboring the point, here is a sample of the syntax:

```
// A basic for loop.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Note! 'i' is only visible within the scope of the for loop.
     for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Number is: {0} ", i);
     }
     // 'i' is not visible here.
}
```

All of your old C, C++, and Java tricks still hold when building a C# `for` statement. You can create complex terminating conditions, build endless loops, and make use of the `goto`, `continue`, and `break` keywords. I'll assume that you will bend this iteration construct as you see fit. Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation if you require further details on the C# `for` keyword.

The foreach Loop

The C# `foreach` keyword allows you to iterate over all items within an array, without the need to test for the array's upper limit. Here are two examples using `foreach`, one to traverse an array of strings and the other to traverse an array of integers:

```
// Iterate array items using foreach.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    string[] books = {"Complex Algorithms",
         "Do you Remember Classic COM?",
          "C# and the .NET Platform"};
     foreach (string s in books)
          Console.WriteLine(s);

     int[] myInts = { 10, 20, 30, 40 };
     foreach (int i in myInts)
          Console.WriteLine(i);
}
```

In addition to iterating over simple arrays, `foreach` is also able to iterate over system-supplied or user-defined collections. I'll hold off on the details until Chapter 7, as this aspect of the `foreach` keyword entails an understanding of interface-based programming and the role of the `IEnumerator` and `IEnumerable` interfaces.

The while and do/while Looping Constructs

The `while` looping construct is useful should you wish to execute a block of statements until some terminating condition has been reached. Within the scope of a `while` loop, you will, of course, need to ensure this terminating event is indeed established; otherwise, you will be stuck in an endless loop. In the following example, the message "In while loop" will be continuously printed until the user terminates the loop by entering **yes** at the command prompt:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    string userIsDone = "no";

    // Test on a lower class copy of the string.
    while(userIsDone.ToLower() != "yes")
    {
        Console.Write("Are you done? [yes] [no]: ");
        userIsDone = Console.ReadLine();
        Console.WriteLine("In while loop");
    }
}
```

Closely related to the `while` loop is the `do/while` statement. Like a simple `while` loop, `do/while` is used when you need to perform some action for an undetermined number of times. The difference is that `do/while` loops are guaranteed to execute the corresponding block of code at least once (in contrast, it is possible that a simple `while` loop may never execute if the terminating condition is false from the onset).

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    string userIsDone = "";

    do
```

```
    {
        Console.WriteLine("In do/while loop");
        Console.Write("Are you done? [yes] [no]: ");
        userIsDone = Console.ReadLine();
    }while(userIsDone.ToLower() != "yes");   // Note the semicolon!
}
```

Decision Constructs and the Relational/Equality Operators

Now that you can iterate over a block of statements, the next related concept is how to control the flow of program execution. C# defines two simple constructs to alter the flow of your program, based on various contingencies:

- The `if/else` statement
- The `switch` statement

The if/else Statement

First up is our good friend the `if/else` statement. Unlike in C and C++, however, the `if/else` statement in C# operates only on Boolean expressions, not ad hoc values such as –1, 0. Given this, `if/else` statements typically involve the use of the C# operators shown in Table 3-6 in order to obtain a literal Boolean value.

Table 3-6. *C# Relational and Equality Operators*

C# Equality/Relational Operator	Example Usage	Meaning in Life
`==`	`if(age == 30)`	Returns `true` only if each expression is the same
`!=`	`if("Foo" != myStr)`	Returns `true` only if each expression is different

`<`
`>`
`<=`
`>=`
	`if(bonus < 2000)`
	`if(bonus > 2000)`
	`if(bonus <= 2000)`
	`if(bonus >= 2000)`
		Returns true if expression A is less than, greater than, less than or equal to, or greater than or equal to expression B

Again, C and C++ programmers need to be aware that the old tricks of testing a condition for a value "not equal to zero" will not work in C#. Let's say you want to see if the string you are working with is longer than zero characters. You may be tempted to write

```
// This is illegal, given that Length returns an int, not a bool.
string thoughtOfTheDay = "You CAN teach an old dog new tricks";
if(thoughtOfTheDay.Length)
{
     ...
}
```

If you wish to make use of the `String.Length` property to determine if you have an empty string, you need to modify your conditional expression as follows:

```
// Legal, as this resolves to either true or false.
if( 0 != thoughtOfTheDay.Length)
{
    ...
}
```

An `if` statement may be composed of complex expressions as well and can contain `else` statements to perform more-complex testing. The syntax is identical to C(++) and Java (and not too far removed from Visual Basic). To build complex expressions, C# offers an expected set of conditional operators, as shown in Table 3-7.

Table 3-7. *C# Conditional Operators*

Operator	Example	Meaning in Life
&&	`if((age == 30) && (name == "Fred"))`	Conditional AND operator
||	`if((age == 30) || (name == "Fred"))`	Conditional OR operator
!	`if(!myBool)`	Conditional NOT operator

The switch Statement

The other simple selection construct offered by C# is the `switch` statement. As in other C-based languages, the `switch` statement allows you to handle program flow based on a predefined set of choices. For example, the following `Main()` logic prints a specific string message based on one of two possible selections (the `default` case handles an invalid selection):

```
// Switch on a numerical value.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("1 [C#], 2 [VB]");
    Console.Write("Please pick your language preference: ");

    string langChoice = Console.ReadLine();
    int n = int.Parse(langChoice);

    switch (n)
    {
        case 1:
            Console.WriteLine("Good choice, C# is a fine language.");
        break;
        case 2:
            Console.WriteLine("VB .NET: OOP, multithreading, and more!");
        break;
        default:
            Console.WriteLine("Well...good luck with that!");
        break;
    }
}
```

■ **Note** C# demands that each case (including `default`) that contains executable statements have a terminating `break` or `goto` to avoid fall-through.

One nice feature of the C# `switch` statement is that you can evaluate string data in addition to numeric data. Here is an updated `switch` statement that does this very thing (notice we have no need to parse the user data into a numeric value with this approach):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("C# or VB");
     Console.Write("Please pick your language preference: ");

     string langChoice = Console.ReadLine();
     switch (langChoice)
     {
          case "C#":
               Console.WriteLine("Good choice, C# is a fine language.");
          break;
          case "VB":
               Console.WriteLine("VB .NET: OOP, multithreading and more!");
          break;
          default:
               Console.WriteLine("Well...good luck with that!");
          break;
     }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The IterationsAndDecisions project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Understanding Value Types and Reference Types

Like any programming language, C# defines a number of keywords that represent basic data types such as whole numbers, character data, floating-point numbers, and Boolean values. If you come from a C++ background, you will be happy to know that these intrinsic types are fixed constants in the universe, meaning that when you create an integer data point, all .NET-aware languages understand the fixed nature of this type, and all agree on the range it is capable of handling.

Specifically speaking, a .NET data type may be *value-based* or *reference-based*. Value-based types, which include all numerical data types (`int`, `float`, etc.), as well as enumerations and structures, are allocated *on the stack*. Given this factoid, value types can be quickly removed from memory once they fall out of the defining scope:

```
// Integers are value types!
public void SomeMethod()
{
    int i = 0;
    Console.WriteLine(i);
}  // 'i' is popped off the stack here!
```

When you assign one value type to another, a member-by-member copy is achieved by default. In terms of numerical or Boolean data types, the only "member" to copy is the value of the variable itself:

```
// Assigning two intrinsic value types results in
// two independent variables on the stack.
public void SomeMethod()
{
```

```
    int i = 99;
    int j = i;

    // After the following assignment, 'i' is still 99.
    j = 8732;
}
```

While the previous example is no major newsflash, understand that .NET structures (and enumerations, which are examined later in this chapter) are also value types. Structures, simply put, provide a way to achieve the bare-bones benefits of object orientation (i.e., encapsulation) while having the efficiency of stack-allocated data. Like a class, structures can take constructors (provided they have arguments) and define any number of members.

All structures are implicitly derived from a class named `System.ValueType`. Functionally, the only purpose of `System.ValueType` is to "override" the virtual methods defined by `System.Object` (described in just a moment) to honor value-based, versus reference-based, semantics. In fact, the instance methods defined by `System.ValueType` are identical to those of `System.Object`:

```
// Structures and enumerations extend System.ValueType.
public abstract class ValueType : object
{
    public virtual bool Equals(object obj);
    public virtual int GetHashCode();
    public Type GetType();
    public virtual string ToString();
}
```

Assume you have created a C# structure named `MyPoint`, using the C# `struct` keyword:

```
// Structures are value types!
struct MyPoint
{
     public int x, y;
}
```

To allocate a structure type, you may make use of the `new` keyword, which may seem counterintuitive given that we typically think `new` always implies heap allocation. This is part of the smoke and mirrors maintained by the CLR. As programmers, we can assume everything is an object and `new` value types. However, when the runtime encounters a type derived from `System.ValueType`, stack allocation is achieved:

```
// Still on the stack!
MyPoint p = new MyPoint();
```

As an alternative, structures can be allocated without using the `new` keyword:

```
MyPoint p1;
p1.x = 100;
p1.y = 100;
```

If you take this approach, however, you *must* initialize each piece of field data before use. Failing to do so results in a compiler error.

Value Types, References Types, and the Assignment Operator

Now, ponder the following `Main()` method and observe the output shown in Figure 3-12:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Value Types / Reference Types *****");
     Console.WriteLine("-> Creating p1");
     MyPoint p1 = new MyPoint();
     p1.x = 100;
     p1.y = 100;
     Console.WriteLine("-> Assigning p2 to p1\n");
     MyPoint p2 = p1;

     // Here is p1.
     Console.WriteLine("p1.x = {0}", p1.x);
     Console.WriteLine("p1.y = {0}", p1.y);

     // Here is p2.
     Console.WriteLine("p2.x = {0}", p2.x);
     Console.WriteLine("p2.y = {0}", p2.y);

     // Change p2.x. This will NOT change p1.x.
     Console.WriteLine("-> Changing p2.x to 900");
     p2.x = 900;

     // Print again.
     Console.WriteLine("-> Here are the X values again...");
     Console.WriteLine("p1.x = {0}", p1.x);
     Console.WriteLine("p2.x = {0}", p2.x);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

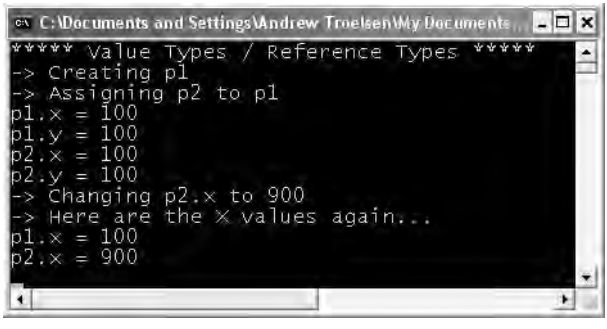

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents
****** Value Types / Reference Types ******
-> Creating p1
-> Assigning p2 to p1
p1.x = 100
p1.y = 100
p2.x = 100
p2.y = 100
-> Changing p2.x to 900
-> Here are the X values again...
p1.x = 100
p2.x = 900

Figure 3-12. *Assignment of value types results in a verbatim copy of each field.*

Here you have created a variable of type `MyPoint` (named `p1`) that is then assigned to another `MyPoint` (`p2`). Because `MyPoint` is a value type, you have two copies of the `MyPoint` type on the stack, each of which can be independently manipulated. Therefore, when you change the value of `p2.x`, the value of `p1.x` is unaffected (just like the behavior seen in the previous integer example).

In stark contrast, reference types (classes) are allocated on the managed heap. These objects stay in memory until the .NET garbage collector destroys them. By default, assignment of reference types results in a new reference to the *same* object on the heap. To illustrate, let's change the definition of the `MyPoint` type from a C# structure to a C# class:

```
// Classes are always reference types.
class MyPoint // <= Now a class!
{
     public int x, y;
}
```

If you were to run the test program once again, you would notice a change in behavior (see Figure 3-13).

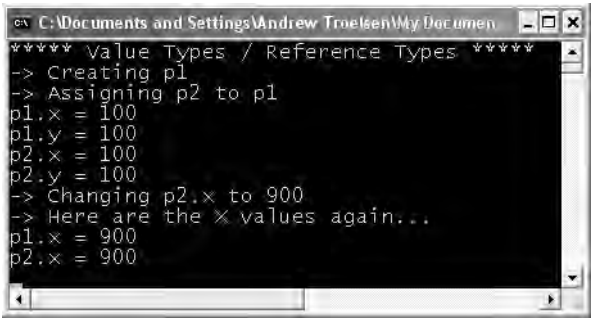

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documen
***** Value Types / Reference Types *****
-> Creating p1
-> Assigning p2 to p1
p1.x = 100
p1.y = 100
p2.x = 100
p2.y = 100
-> Changing p2.x to 900
-> Here are the X values again...
p1.x = 900
p2.x = 900

Figure 3-13. *Assignment of reference types copies the reference.*

In this case, you have two references pointing to the same object on the managed heap. Therefore, when you change the value of `x` using the `p2` reference, `p1.x` reports the same value.

Value Types Containing Reference Types

Now that you have a better feeling for the differences between value types and reference types, let's examine a more complex example. Assume you have the following reference (class) type that maintains an informational string that can be set using a custom constructor:

```
class ShapeInfo
{
     public string infoString;
     public ShapeInfo(string info)
     { infoString = info; }
}
```

Now assume that you want to contain a variable of this class type within a value type named `MyRectangle`. To allow the outside world to set the value of the inner `ShapeInfo`, you also provide a custom constructor (as explained in just a bit, the default constructor of a structure is reserved and cannot be redefined):

```
struct MyRectangle
{
     // The MyRectangle structure contains a reference type member.
     public ShapeInfo rectInfo;

     public int top, left, bottom, right;
```

```
    public MyRectangle(string info)
    {
        rectInfo = new ShapeInfo(info);
        top = left = 10;
        bottom = right = 100;
    }
}
```

At this point, you have contained a reference type within a value type. The million-dollar question now becomes, what happens if you assign one `MyRectangle` variable to another? Given what you already know about value types, you would be correct in assuming that the integer data (which is indeed a structure) should be an independent entity for each `MyRectangle` variable. But what about the internal reference type? Will the object's state be fully copied, or will the *reference* to that object be copied? Ponder the following code and check out Figure 3-14 for the answer.

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Create the first MyRectangle.
    Console.WriteLine("-> Creating r1");
    MyRectangle r1 = new MyRectangle("This is my first rect");

    // Now assign a new MyRectangle to r1.
    Console.WriteLine("-> Assigning r2 to r1");
    MyRectangle r2;
    r2 = r1;

    // Change values of r2.
    Console.WriteLine("-> Changing all values of r2");
    r2.rectInfo.infoString = "This is new info!";
    r2.bottom = 4444;

    // Print values
    Console.WriteLine("-> Values after change:");
    Console.WriteLine("-> r1.rectInfo.infoString: {0}", r1.rectInfo.infoString);
    Console.WriteLine("-> r2.rectInfo.infoString: {0}", r2.rectInfo.infoString);
    Console.WriteLine("-> r1.bottom: {0}", r1.bottom);
    Console.WriteLine("-> r2.bottom: {0}", r2.bottom);
}
```

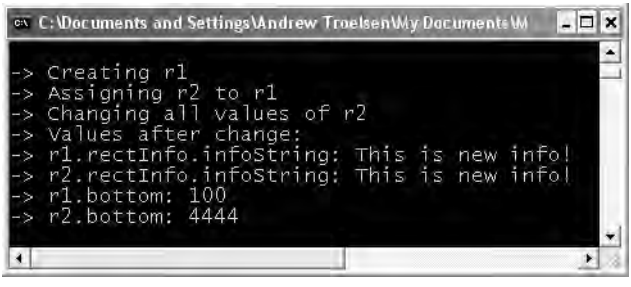

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\M
-> Creating r1
-> Assigning r2 to r1
-> Changing all values of r2
-> Values after change:
-> r1.rectInfo.infoString: This is new info!
-> r2.rectInfo.infoString: This is new info!
-> r1.bottom: 100
-> r2.bottom: 4444

Figure 3-14. *The internal references point to the same object!*

As you can see, when you change the value of the informational string using the `r2` reference, the `r1` reference displays the same value. By default, when a value type contains other reference types,

assignment results in a copy *of the references*. In this way, you have two independent structures, each of which contains a reference pointing to the same object in memory (i.e., a "shallow copy"). When you want to perform a "deep copy," where the state of internal references is fully copied into a new object, you need to implement the `ICloneable` interface (as you will do in Chapter 7).

■ **Source Code** The ValAndRef project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Passing Reference Types by Value

Reference types can obviously be passed as parameters to type members. However, passing an object by reference is quite different from passing it by value. To understand the distinction, assume you have a `Person` class, defined as follows:

```
class Person
{
     public string fullName;
     public byte age;
     public Person(string n, byte a)
     {
          fullName = n;
          age = a;
     }
     public Person(){}
     public void PrintInfo()
     { Console.WriteLine("{0}  is {1}  years old", fullName, age); }
}
```

Now, what if you create a method that allows the caller to send in the `Person` type by value (note the lack of parameter modifiers):

```
public static void SendAPersonByValue(Person p)
{
     // Change the age of 'p'?
     p.age = 99;

     // Will the caller see this reassignment?
     p = new Person("Nikki", 999);
}
```

Notice how the `SendAPersonByValue()` method attempts to reassign the incoming `Person` reference to a new object as well as change some state data. Now let's test this method using the following `Main()` method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Passing ref-types by value.
     Console.WriteLine("***** Passing Person object by value *****");
     Person fred = new Person("Fred", 12);
     Console.WriteLine("Before by value call, Person is:");
     fred.PrintInfo();
     SendAPersonByValue(fred);
     Console.WriteLine("After by value call, Person is:");
     fred.PrintInfo();
}
```

Figure 3-15 shows the output of this call.

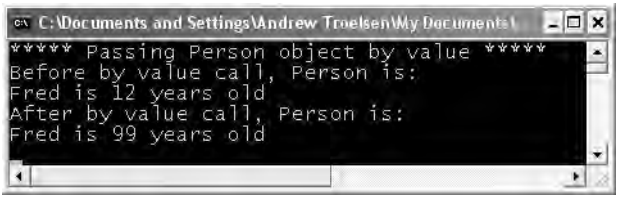

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\
***** Passing Person object by value *****
Before by value call, Person is:
Fred is 12 years old
After by value call, Person is:
Fred is 99 years old

Figure 3-15. *Passing reference types by value locks the reference in place.*

As you can see, the value of age has been modified. This behavior seems to fly in the face of what it means to pass a parameter "by value." Given that you were able to change the state of the incoming Person, what was copied? The answer: a copy of the *reference* to the caller's object. Therefore, as the SendAPersonByValue() method is pointing to the same object as the caller, it is possible to alter the object's state data. What is *not* possible is to reassign what the reference is pointing to (slightly akin to a constant pointer in C++).

Passing Reference Types by Reference

Now assume you have a SendAPersonByReference() method, which passes a reference type by reference (note the ref parameter modifier):

```
public static void SendAPersonByReference(ref Person p)
{
     // Change some data of 'p'.
     p.age = 555;

     // 'p' is now pointing to a new object on the heap!
     p = new Person("Nikki", 999);
}
```

As you might expect, this allows complete flexibility of how the callee is able to manipulate the incoming parameter. Not only can the callee change the state of the object, but if it so chooses, it may also reassign the reference to a new Person type. Now ponder the following usage:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Passing ref-types by ref.
     Console.WriteLine("\n***** Passing Person object by reference *****");
     Person mel = new Person("Mel", 23);
     Console.WriteLine("Before by ref call, Person is:");
     mel.PrintInfo();
     SendAPersonByReference(ref mel);
     Console.WriteLine("After by ref call, Person is:");
     mel.PrintInfo();
}
```

As you can see from Figure 3-16, the type named Fred returns after the call as a type named Nikki.


C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My ...
***** Passing Person object by reference *****
Before by ref call, Person is:
Mel is 23 years old
After by ref call, Person is:
Nikki is 999 years old

Figure 3-16. *Passing reference types by reference allows the reference to be redirected.*

The golden rule to keep in mind when passing reference types by reference is as follows:

- If a reference type is passed by reference, the callee may change the values of the object's state data *as well as the object it is referencing*.

■ **Source Code** The RefTypeValTypeParams project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Value and Reference Types: Final Details

To wrap up this topic, ponder the information in Table 3-8, which summarizes the core distinctions between value types and reference types.

Table 3-8. *Value Types and Reference Types Side by Side*

Intriguing Question	Value Type	Reference Type
Where is this type allocated?	Allocated on the stack.	Allocated on the managed heap.
How is a variable represented?	Value type variables are local copies.	Reference type variables are pointing to the memory occupied by the allocated instance.
What is the base type?	Must derive from `System.ValueType`.	Can derive from any other type (except `System.ValueType`), as long as that type is not "sealed" (more details on this in Chapter 4).
Can this type function as a base to other types?	No. Value types are always sealed and cannot be extended.	Yes. If the type is not sealed, it may function as a base to other types.
What is the default parameter passing behavior?	Variables are passed by value (i.e., a copy of the variable is passed into the called function).	Variables are passed by reference (e.g., the address of the variable is passed into the called function).
Can this type override `System.Object.Finalize()`?	No. Value types are never placed onto the heap and therefore do not need to be finalized.	Yes, indirectly (more details on this in Chapter 4).
Can I define constructors for this type?	Yes, but the default constructor is reserved (i.e., your custom constructors must all have arguments).	But of course!
When do variables of this type die?	When they fall out of the defining scope.	When the managed heap is garbage collected.

Despite their differences, value types and reference types both have the ability to implement interfaces and may support any number of fields, methods, overloaded operators, constants, properties, and events.

Understanding Boxing and Unboxing Operations

Given that .NET defines two major categories of types (value based and reference based), you may occasionally need to represent a variable of one category as a variable of the other category. C# provides a very simple mechanism, termed *boxing*, to convert a value type to a reference type. Assume that you have created a variable of type `short`:

```
// Make a short value type.
short s = 25;
```

If, during the course of your application, you wish to represent this value type as a reference type, you would "box" the value as follows:

```
// Box the value into an object reference.
object objShort = s;
```

Boxing can be formally defined as the process of explicitly converting a value type into a corresponding reference type by storing the variable in a `System.Object`. When you box a value, the CLR allocates a new object on the heap and copies the value type's value (in this case, 25) into that instance. What is returned to you is a reference to the newly allocated object. Using this technique, .NET developers have no need to make use of a set of wrapper classes used to temporarily treat stack data as heap-allocated objects.

The opposite operation is also permitted through *unboxing*. Unboxing is the process of converting the value held in the object reference back into a corresponding value type on the stack. The unboxing operation begins by verifying that the receiving data type is equivalent to the boxed type, and if so, it copies the value back into a local stack-based variable. For example, the following unboxing operation works successfully, given that the underlying type of the `objShort` is indeed a `short` (you'll examine the C# casting operator in detail in the next chapter, so hold tight for now):

```
// Unbox the reference back into a corresponding short.
short anotherShort = (short)objShort;
```

Again, it is mandatory that you unbox into an appropriate data type. Thus, the following unboxing logic generates an `InvalidCastException` exception (more details on exception handling in Chapter 6):

```
// Illegal unboxing.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     try
     {
          // The type contained in the box is NOT a int, but a short!
          int i = (int)objShort;
     }
     catch(InvalidCastException e)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("OOPS!\n{0} ", e.ToString());
     }
}
```

Some Practical (Un)Boxing Examples

So, you may be thinking, when would you really need to manually box (or unbox) a data type? The previous example was purely illustrative in nature, as there was no good reason to box (and then unbox) the `short` data point. The truth of the matter is that you will seldom—if ever—need to manually box data types. Much of the time, the C# compiler automatically boxes variables when appropriate. For example, if you pass a value type into a method requiring an object parameter, boxing occurs behind the curtains.

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        // Create an int (value type).
        int myInt = 99;

        // Because myInt is passed into a
        // method prototyped to take an object,
        // myInt is 'boxed' automatically.
        UseThisObject(myInt);
        Console.ReadLine();
    }

    static void UseThisObject(object o)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Value of o is: {0}", o);
    }
}
```

Automatic boxing also occurs when working with the types of the .NET base class libraries. For example, the `System.Collections` namespace (formally examined in Chapter 7) defines a class type named `ArrayList`. Like most collection types, `ArrayList` provides members that allow you to insert, obtain, and remove items:

```
public class System.Collections.ArrayList : object,
    System.Collections.IList,
    System.Collections.ICollection,
    System.Collections.IEnumerable,
    ICloneable
{
...
     public virtual int Add(object value);
     public virtual void Insert(int index, object value);
     public virtual void Remove(object obj);
     public virtual object this[int index] {get; set; }
}
```

As you can see, these members operate on generic `System.Object` types. Given that everything ultimately derives from this common base class, the following code is perfectly legal:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     ArrayList myInts = new ArrayList();
     myInts.Add(88);
     myInts.Add(3.33);
     myInts.Add(false);
}
```

However, given your understanding of value types and reference types, you might wonder exactly what was placed into the `ArrayList` type. (References? Copies of references? Copies of structures?) Just like with the previous `UseThisObject()` method, it should be clear that each of the `System.Int32` data types were indeed boxed before being placed into the `ArrayList` type. To retrieve an item from the `ArrayList` type, you are required to unbox accordingly:

```
static void BoxAndUnboxInts()
{
    // Box ints into ArrayList.
    ArrayList myInts = new ArrayList();
    myInts.Add(88);
    myInts.Add(3.33);
    myInts.Add(false);

    // Unbox first item from ArrayList.
    int firstItem = (int)myInts[0];
    Console.WriteLine("First item is {0}", firstItem);
}
```

To be sure, boxing and unboxing types takes some processing time and, if used without restraint, could hurt the performance of your application. However, with this .NET technique, you are able to symmetrically operate on value-based and reference-based types.

■ **Note** Under C# 2.0, boxing and unboxing penalties can be eliminated using *generics*, which you'll examine in Chapter 10.

Unboxing Custom Value Types

When you pass custom structures or enumerations into a method prototyped to take a `System.Object`, a boxing operation also occurs. However, once the incoming parameter has been received by the called method, you will not be able to access any members of the struct (or enum) until you unbox the type. Recall the `MyPoint` structure defined previously in this chapter:

```
struct MyPoint
{
     public int x, y;
}
```

Assume you now send a `MyPoint` variable into a new method named `UseBoxedMyPoint()`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    MyPoint p;
    p.x = 10;
    p.y = 20;
    UseBoxedMyPoint(p);
}
```

If you attempt to access the field data of `MyPoint`, you receive a compiler error, as the method assumes you are operating on a strongly typed `System.Object`:

```
static void UseBoxedMyPoint(object o)
{
     // Error!  System.Object does not have
     // member variables named 'x' or 'y'.
     Console.WriteLine("{0}, {1}", o.x, o.y);
}
```

To access the field data of `MyPoint`, you must first unbox the parameter. As a sanity check, you can leverage the C# `is` keyword to ensure the parameter is indeed a `MyPoint` variable. The `is` keyword is further examined in Chapter 4; however, here is some example usage:

```
static void UseBoxedMyPoint(object o)
{
    if (o is MyPoint)
    {
        MyPoint p = (MyPoint)o;
        Console.WriteLine("{0}, {1}", p.x, p.y);
    }
    else
        Console.WriteLine("You did not send a MyPoint.");
}
```

■ **Source Code** The Boxing project is included under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Working with .NET Enumerations

In addition to structures, *enumerations* (or simply *enums*) are the other member of the .NET value type category. When you build a program, it is often convenient to create a set of symbolic names for underlying numerical values. For example, if you are creating an employee payroll system, you may wish to use the constants `Manager`, `Grunt`, `Contractor`, and `VP` rather than simple numerical values such as `{0, 1, 2, 3}`. C# supports the notion of custom enumerations for this very reason. For example, here is the `EmpType` enumeration:

```
// A custom enumeration.
enum EmpType
{
     Manager,      //  = 0
     Grunt,        //  = 1
     Contractor,   //  = 2
     VP            //  = 3
}
```

The `EmpType` enumeration defines four named constants corresponding to specific numerical values. In C#, the numbering scheme sets the first element to zero (0) by default, followed by an *n + 1* progression. You are free to change this behavior as you see fit:

```
// Begin numbering at 102.
enum EmpType
{
     Manager = 102,
     Grunt,          //  = 103
     Contractor,     //  = 104
     VP              //  = 105
}
```

Enumerations do not necessarily need to follow a sequential order. If (for some reason) it made good sense to establish your `EmpType` as follows, the compiler continues to be happy:

```
// Elements of an enumeration need not be sequential!
enum EmpType
{
```

```
    Manager = 10,
    Grunt = 1,
    Contractor = 100,
    VP = 9
}
```

Under the hood, the storage type used for each item in an enumeration maps to a `System.Int32` by default. You are also free to change this to your liking. For example, if you want to set the underlying storage value of `EmpType` to be a `byte` rather than an `int`, you would write the following:

```
// This time, EmpType maps to an underlying byte.
enum EmpType : byte
{
    Manager = 10,
    Grunt = 1,
    Contractor = 100,
    VP = 9
}
```

■ **Note** C# enumerations can be defined in a similar manner for any of the numerical types (`byte`, `sbyte`, `short`, `ushort`, `int`, `uint`, `long`, or `ulong`). This can be helpful if you are programming for low-memory devices such as Pocket PCs or .NET-enabled cellular phones.

Once you have established the range and storage type of your enumeration, you can use them in place of so-called magic numbers. Assume you have a class defining a static function, taking `EmpType` as the sole parameter:

```
static void AskForBonus(EmpType e)
{
    switch(e)
    {
        case EmpType.Contractor:
            Console.WriteLine("You already get enough cash...");
        break;
        case EmpType.Grunt:
            Console.WriteLine("You have got to be kidding...");
        break;
        case EmpType.Manager:
            Console.WriteLine("How about stock options instead?");
        break;
        case EmpType.VP:
            Console.WriteLine("VERY GOOD, Sir!");
        break;
        default: break;
    }
}
```

This method can be invoked as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Make a contractor type.
    EmpType fred;
    fred = EmpType.Contractor;
    AskForBonus(fred);
}
```

■ **Note** The value of an enum must always be referenced by prefixing the enum name (e.g., `EmpType.Grunt`, not simply `Grunt`).

The System.Enum Base Class

The interesting thing about .NET enumerations is that they implicitly derive from `System.Enum`. This base class defines a number of methods that allow you to interrogate and transform a given enumeration. Table 3-9 documents some items of interest, all of which are static.

Table 3-9. *Select Static Members of* `System.Enum`

Member	Meaning in Life
`Format()`	Converts a value of a specified enumerated type to its equivalent string representation according to the specified format
`GetName()` `GetNames()`	Retrieves a name (or an array containing all names) for the constant in the specified enumeration that has the specified value
`GetUnderlyingType()`	Returns the underlying data type used to hold the values for a given enumeration
`GetValues()`	Retrieves an array of the values of the constants in a specified enumeration
`IsDefined()`	Returns an indication of whether a constant with a specified value exists in a specified enumeration
`Parse()`	Converts the string representation of the name or numeric value of one or more enumerated constants to an equivalent enumerated object

You can make use of the static `Enum.Format()` method and the same exact string formatting flags examined earlier in the chapter during our examination of `System.Console`. For example, you may extract the string name (by specifying `G`), the hexadecimal value (`X`), or numeric value (`D`, `F`, etc.) of a given enum.

`System.Enum` also defines a static method named `GetValues()`. This method returns an instance of `System.Array` (examined later in this chapter), with each item in the array corresponding to name/value pairs of the specified enumeration. To illustrate these points, ponder the following:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Print information for the EmpType enumeration.
     Array obj = Enum.GetValues(typeof(EmpType));
     Console.WriteLine("This enum has {0}  members.", obj.Length);

     foreach(EmpType e in obj)
     {
          Console.Write("String name: {0},", e.ToString());
          Console.Write(" int: ({0}),", Enum.Format(typeof(EmpType), e, "D"));
          Console.Write(" hex: ({0})\n", Enum.Format(typeof(EmpType), e, "X"));
     }
}
```

As you can guess, this code block prints out the name/value pairs (in decimal and hexadecimal) for the `EmpType` enumeration.

Next, let's explore the `IsDefined` property. This property allows you to determine if a given string name is a member of the current enumeration. For example, assume you wish to know if the value `SalesPerson` is part of the `EmpType` enumeration. To do so, you must send it the type information of the enumeration (which can be done via the C# `typeof` operator) and the string name of the value you wish to query (type information will be examined in much greater detail in Chapter 12):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Does EmpType have a SalesPerson value?
     if(Enum.IsDefined(typeof(EmpType), "SalesPerson"))
          Console.WriteLine("Yep, we have sales people.");
     else
          Console.WriteLine("No, we have no profits...");
}
```

It is also possible to generate an enumeration set to the correct value from a string literal via the static `Enum.Parse()` method. Given that `Parse()` returns a generic `System.Object`, you will need to cast the return value into the correct enum type:

```
// Prints: "Sally is a Manager"
EmpType sally = (EmpType)Enum.Parse(typeof(EmpType), "Manager");
Console.WriteLine("Sally is a {0}", sally.ToString());
```

Last but not least, it is worth pointing out that C# enumerations support the use of various operators, which test against the assigned values, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Which of these two EmpType variables has the greatest numerical value?
     EmpType Joe = EmpType.VP;
     EmpType Fran = EmpType.Grunt;

     if(Joe < Fran)
          Console.WriteLine("Joe's value is less than Fran's value.");
     else
          Console.WriteLine("Fran's value is less than Joe's value.");
}
```

■ **Source Code** The Enums project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

The Master Class: System.Object

■ **Tip** The following examination of `System.Object` requires you to understand the concept of virtual methods and method overriding. If you are new to the world of OOP, you may wish to reread this section once you complete Chapter 4.

In .NET, every type is ultimately derived from a common base class: `System.Object`. The `Object` class defines a common set of members supported by every type in the .NET universe. When you create a class that does not explicitly specify its base class, you implicitly derive from `System.Object`:

```
// Implicitly deriving from System.Object.
class HelloClass
{...}
```

If you wish to be more clear with your intension, the C# colon operator (`:`) allows you to explicitly specify a type's base class (such as `System.Object`):

```
// In both cases we are explicitly deriving from System.Object.
class ShapeInfo : System.Object
{...}

class ShapeInfo : object
{...}
```

`System.Object` defines a set of instance-level and class-level (static) members. Note that some of the instance-level members are declared using the `virtual` keyword and can therefore be *overridden* by a derived class:

```
// The topmost class in the .NET universe: System.Object
namespace System
{
     public class Object
     {
          public Object();
          public virtual Boolean Equals(Object obj);
          public virtual Int32 GetHashCode();
          public Type GetType();
          public virtual String ToString();
          protected virtual void Finalize();
          protected Object MemberwiseClone();
          public static bool Equals(object objA, object objB);
          public static bool ReferenceEquals(object objA, object objB);
     }
}
```

Table 3-10 offers a rundown of the functionality provided by each instance-level method.

Table 3-10. *Core Members of* `System.Object`

Instance Method of `Object` Class	Meaning in Life
`Equals()`	By default, this method returns true only if the items being compared refer to the exact same item in memory. Thus, `Equals()` is used to compare object references, not the state of the object. Typically, this method is overridden to return true only if the objects being compared have the same internal state values (that is, value-based semantics). Be aware that if you override `Equals()`, you should also override `GetHashCode()`.
`GetHashCode()`	This method returns an integer that identifies a specific object in memory. If you intend your custom types to be contained in a `System.Collections.Hashtable` type, you are well-advised to override the default implementation of this member.
`GetType()`	This method returns a `System.Type` object that fully describes the details of the current item. In short, this is a Runtime Type Identification (RTTI) method available to all objects (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 12).

Continued

Table 3-10. *(Continued)*

Instance Method of `Object` Class	Meaning in Life
`ToString()`	This method returns a string representation of a given object, using the `namespace.typename` format (i.e., fully qualified name). If the type has not been defined within a namespace, `typename` alone is returned. This method can be overridden by a subclass to return a tokenized string of name/value pairs that represent the object's internal state, rather than its fully qualified name.
`Finalize()`	For the time being, you can understand that this protected method (when overridden) is invoked by the .NET runtime when an object is to be removed from the heap. We investigate the garbage collection process in Chapter 5.
`MemberwiseClone()`	This protected method exists to return a new object that is a member-by-member copy of the current object. Thus, if your object contains references to other objects, the *references* to these types are copied (i.e., it achieves a shallow copy). If the object contains value types, full copies of the values are achieved.

The Default Behavior of System.Object

To illustrate some of the default behavior provided by the `System.Object` base class, assume a class named `Person` defined in a custom namespace named `ObjectMethods`:

```
// The 'namespace' keyword is fully examined at the end of this chapter.
namespace ObjectMethods
{
     class Person
     {
          public Person(string fname, string lname, string s, byte a)
          {
               firstName = fname;
               lastName = lname;
               SSN = s;
               age = a;
          }
          public Person(){}

          // The state of a person.
          public string firstName;
          public string lastName;
          public string SSN;
          public byte age;
     }
}
```

Now, within our `Main()` method, we make use of the `Person` type as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Working with Object *****\n");

     Person fred = new Person("Fred", "Clark", "111-11-1111", 20);
     Console.WriteLine("-> fred.ToString: {0}", fred.ToString());
     Console.WriteLine("-> fred.GetHashCode: {0}", fred.GetHashCode());
     Console.WriteLine("-> fred's base class: {0}", fred.GetType().BaseType);
```

```
    // Make some other references to 'fred'.
    Person p2 = fred;
    object o = p2;

    // Are all 3 instances pointing to the same object in memory?
    if(o.Equals(fred) && p2.Equals(o))
        Console.WriteLine("fred, p2 and o are referencing the same object!");
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Figure 3-17 shows a test run.

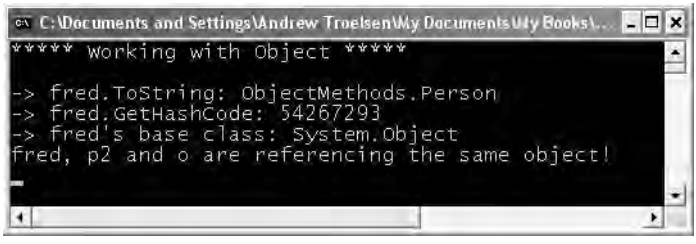

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Books\...
***** Working with Object *****
-> fred.ToString: ObjectMethods.Person
-> fred.GetHashCode: 54267293
-> fred's base class: System.Object
fred, p2 and o are referencing the same object!

Figure 3-17. *Default implementation of select* `System.Object` *members*

First, notice how the default implementation of `ToString()` simply returns the fully qualified name of the type (e.g., `namespace.typename`). `GetType()` retrieves a `System.Type` object, which defines a property named `BaseType` (as you can guess, this will identify the fully qualified name of the type's base class).

Now, reexamine the code that leverages the `Equals()` method. Here, a new `Person` object is placed on the managed heap, and the reference to this object is stored in the `fred` reference variable. `p2` is also of type `Person`, however, you are not creating a *new* instance of the `Person` class, but assigning `p2` to `fred`. Therefore, `fred` and `p2` are both pointing to the same object in memory, as is the variable `o` (of type `object`, which was thrown in for good measure). Given that `fred`, `p2`, and `o` all point to the same object in memory, the equality test succeeds.

Overriding Some Default Behaviors of System.Object

Although the canned behavior of `System.Object` can fit the bill in most cases, it is quite common for your custom types to override some of these inherited methods. Chapter 4 provides a complete examination of OOP under C#, but in a nutshell, *overriding* is the process of redefining the behavior of an inherited *virtual* member in a derived class. As you have just seen, `System.Object` defines a number of virtual methods (such as `ToString()` and `Equals()`) that do define a canned implementation. However, if you want to build a custom implementation of these virtual members for a derived type, you make use of the C# `override` keyword.

Overriding System.Object.ToString()

Overriding the `ToString()` method provides a way to quickly gain a snapshot of an object's current state. As you might guess, this can be helpful during the debugging process. To illustrate, let's override `System.Object.ToString()` to return a textual representation of a person's state (note we are using a new namespace named `System.Text`):

```
// Need to reference System.Text to access StringBuilder type.
using System;
using System.Text;

class Person
{
     // Overriding System.Object.ToString().
     public override string ToString()
     {
          StringBuilder sb = new StringBuilder();
          sb.AppendFormat("[FirstName={0};", this.firstName);
          sb.AppendFormat(" LastName={0};", this.lastName);
          sb.AppendFormat(" SSN={0};", this.SSN);
          sb.AppendFormat(" Age={0}]", this.age);
          return sb.ToString();
     }
...
}
```

How you format the string returned from `System.Object.ToString()` is largely a matter of personal choice. In this example, the name/value pairs have been contained within square brackets, with each pair separated by a semicolon (a common technique within the .NET base class libraries).

Also notice that this example makes use of a new type, `System.Text.StringBuilder` (which is also a matter of personal choice). This type is described in greater detail later in the chapter. The short answer, however, is that `StringBuilder` is a more efficient alternative to C# string concatenation.

Overriding System.Object.Equals()

Let's also override the behavior of `System.Object.Equals()` to work with *value-based semantics*. Recall that by default, `Equals()` returns true only if the two references being compared are pointing to the same object on the heap. In many cases, however, you don't necessary care if two references are pointing to the same object in memory, but you are more interested if the two objects have the same state data (`name`, `SSN`, and `age` in the case of a `Person`):

```
public override bool Equals(object o)
{
     // Make sure the caller sent a valid
     // Person object before proceeding.
     if (o != null && o is Person)
     {
          // Now see if the incoming Person
          // has the exact same information as
          // the current object (this).
          Person temp = (Person)o;
          if (temp.firstName == this.firstName &&
              temp.lastName == this.lastName &&
              temp.SSN == this.SSN &&
              temp.age == this.age)
          return true;
     }
```

```
    return false;   // Not the same!
}
```

Here you are first verifying the caller did indeed pass in a `Person` object to the `Equals()` method using the C# `is` keyword. After this point, you go about examining the values of the incoming parameter against the values of the current object's field data (note the use of the `this` keyword, which refers to the current object).

The prototype of `System.Object.Equals()` takes a single argument of type `object`. Thus, you are required to perform an explicit cast within the `Equals()` method to access the members of the `Person` type. If the name, SSN, and age of each are identical, you have two objects with the same state data and therefore return true. If any point of data is not identical, you return false.

If you override `System.Object.ToString()` for a given class, you can take a very simple shortcut when overriding `System.Object.Equals()`. Given that the value returned from `ToString()` should take into account all of the member variables of the current class (and possible data declared in base classes), `Equals()` can simply compare the values of the string types:

```
public override bool Equals(object o)
{
    if (o != null && o is Person)
    {
        Person temp = (Person)o;
        if (this.ToString() == o.ToString())
            return true;
        else
            return false;
    }
    return false;
}
```

Now, for the sake of argument, assume you have a type named `Car`, and attempt to pass in a `Car` instance to the `Person.Equals()` method as so:

```
// Cars are not people!
Car c = new Car();
Person p = new Person();
p.Equals(c);
```

Given your runtime check for a true-blue `Person` object (via the `is` operator) the `Equals()` method returns false. Now consider the following invocation:

```
// Oops!
Person p = new Person();
p.Equals(null);
```

This would also be safe, given your check for an incoming null reference.

Overriding System.Object.GetHashCode()

When a class overrides the `Equals()` method, best practices dictate that you should also override `System.Object.GetHashCode()`. If you fail to do so, you are issued a compiler warning. The role of `GetHashCode()` is to return a numerical value that identifies an object based on its internal state data. Thus, if you have two `Person` objects that have an identical first name, last name, SSN, and age, you should obtain the same hash code.

By and large, overriding this method is only useful if you intend to store a custom type within a hash-based collection such as `System.Collections.Hashtable`. Under the hood, the `Hashtable` type calls the `Equals()` and `GetHashCode()` members of the contained types to determine the correct object to return to the caller. Due to the fact that `System.Object` has no clue about the state data of derived types, you should override this member for any type you wish to store in a `Hashtable`.

There are many algorithms that can be used to create a hash code—some fancy, others not so fancy. As mentioned, an object's hash value will be based on its state data. As luck would have it, the `System.String` class has a very solid implementation of `GetHashCode()` that is based on the string's character data. Therefore, if you can identify a string field that should be unique among objects (such as the `Person`'s `SSN` field), you can simply call `GetHashCode()` on the field's string representation:

```
// Return a hash code based on the person's SSN.
public override int GetHashCode()
{
     return SSN.GetHashCode();
}
```

If you cannot identify a single point of data in your class, but have overridden `ToString()`, you can simply return the hash code of the string returned from your custom `ToString()` implementation:

```
// Return a hash code based our custom ToString().
public override int GetHashCode()
{
     return ToString().GetHashCode();
}
```

Testing the Overridden Members

You can now test your updated `Person` class. Add the following code to your `Main()` method and check out Figure 3-18 for output:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // NOTE:  We want these to be identical for testing purposes.
     Person p3 = new Person("Fred", "Jones", "222-22-2222", 98);
     Person p4 = new Person("Fred", "Jones", "222-22-2222", 98);

     // Should have same hash code and string at this point.
     Console.WriteLine("-> Hash code of p3 = {0}", p3.GetHashCode());
     Console.WriteLine("-> Hash code of p4 = {0}", p4.GetHashCode());
     Console.WriteLine("-> String of p3 = {0}", p3.ToString());
     Console.WriteLine("-> String of p4 = {0}", p4.ToString());

     // Should be equal at this point.
     if (p3.Equals(p4))
          Console.WriteLine("-> P3 and p4 have same state!");
     else
          Console.WriteLine("-> P3 and p4 have different state!");

     // Change age of p4.
     Console.WriteLine("\n-> Changing the age of p4\n");
     p4.age = 2;

     // No longer equal, different hash values and string data.
     Console.WriteLine("-> String of p3 = {0}", p3.ToString());
     Console.WriteLine("-> String of p4 = {0}", p4.ToString());
     Console.WriteLine("-> Hash code of p3 = {0}", p3.GetHashCode());
     Console.WriteLine("-> Hash code of p4 = {0}", p4.GetHashCode());
     if (p3.Equals(p4))
         Console.WriteLine("-> P3 and p4 have same state!");
     else
         Console.WriteLine("-> P3 and p4 have different state!");
}
```

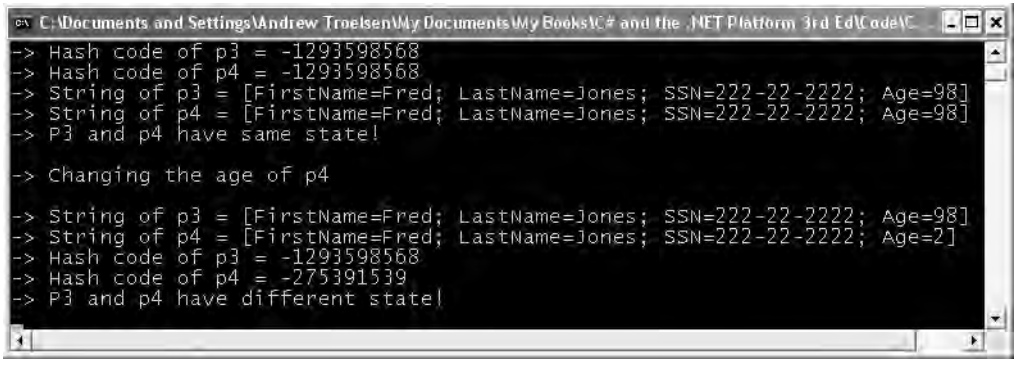

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Platform 3rd Ed\Code\C...
-> Hash code of p3 = -1293598568
-> Hash code of p4 = -1293598568
-> String of p3 = [FirstName=Fred; LastName=Jones; SSN=222-22-2222; Age=98]
-> String of p4 = [FirstName=Fred; LastName=Jones; SSN=222-22-2222; Age=98]
-> P3 and p4 have same state!
-> Changing the age of p4
-> String of p3 = [FirstName=Fred; LastName=Jones; SSN=222-22-2222; Age=98]
-> String of p4 = [FirstName=Fred; LastName=Jones; SSN=222-22-2222; Age=2]
-> Hash code of p3 = -1293598568
-> Hash code of p4 = -275391539
-> P3 and p4 have different state!

Figure 3-18. *Overridden* `System.Object` *members in action*

Static Members of System.Object

To wrap up our examination of this supreme base class of .NET, it is worth pointing out that `System.Object` does define two static members (`Object.Equals()` and `Object.ReferenceEquals()`) that test for value-based or reference-based equality. Consider the following code:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Assume two identically configured objects.
     Person p3 = new Person("Fred", "Jones", "222-22-2222", 98);
     Person p4 = new Person("Fred", "Jones", "222-22-2222", 98);

     // Do p3 and p4 have the same state? TRUE!
     Console.WriteLine("Do P3 and p4 have same state: {0} ", object.Equals(p3, p4));

     // Are they the same object in memory? FALSE!
     Console.WriteLine("Are P3 and p4 are pointing to same object: {0} ",
          object.ReferenceEquals(p3, p4));
}
```

■ **Source Code** The ObjectMethods project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

The System Data Types (and C# Shorthand Notation)

As you may have begun to notice, every intrinsic C# data type is actually a shorthand notation for defining an existing type defined in the `System` namespace. Table 3-11 lists each system data type, its range, the corresponding C# alias, and the type's compliance with the Common Language Specification (CLS).

Table 3-11. *System Types and C# Shorthand*

C# Shorthand	CLS Compliant?	System Type	Range	Meaning in Life
`sbyte`	No	`System.SByte`	–128 to 127	Signed 8-bit number
`byte`	Yes	`System.Byte`	0 to 255	Unsigned 8-bit number
`short`	Yes	`System.Int16`	–32,768 to 32,767	Signed 16-bit number
`ushort`	No	`System.UInt16`	0 to 65,535	Unsigned 16-bit number
`int`	Yes	`System.Int32`	–2,147,483,648 to 2,147,483,647	Signed 32-bit number
`uint`	No	`System.UInt32`	0 to 4,294,967,295	Unsigned 32-bit number
`long`	Yes	`System.Int64`	–9,223,372,036,854,775,808 to 9,223,372,036,854,775,807	Signed 64-bit number
`ulong`	No	`System.UInt64`	0 to 18,446,744,073,709,551,615	Unsigned 64-bit number
`char`	Yes	`System.Char`	U0000 to Uffff	A single 16-bit Unicode character
`float`	Yes	`System.Single`	1.5×10^{-45} to 3.4×10^{38}	32-bit floating point number
`double`	Yes	`System.Double`	5.0×10^{-324} to 1.7×10^{308}	64-bit floating point number
`bool`	Yes	`System.Boolean`	`true` or `false`	Represents truth or falsity
`decimal`	Yes	`System.Decimal`	10^{0} to 10^{28}	A 96-bit signed number
`string`	Yes	`System.String`	Limited by system memory	Represents a set of Unicode characters
`object`	Yes	`System.Object`	Any type can be stored in an object variable	The base class of all types in the .NET universe

■ **Note** By default, a real numeric literal on the right-hand side of the assignment operator is treated as `double`. Therefore, to initialize a float variable, use the suffix f or F (5.3F).

It is very interesting to note that even the primitive .NET data types are arranged in a class hierarchy. The relationship between these core system types (as well as some other soon-to-be-discovered types) can be represented as shown in Figure 3-19.

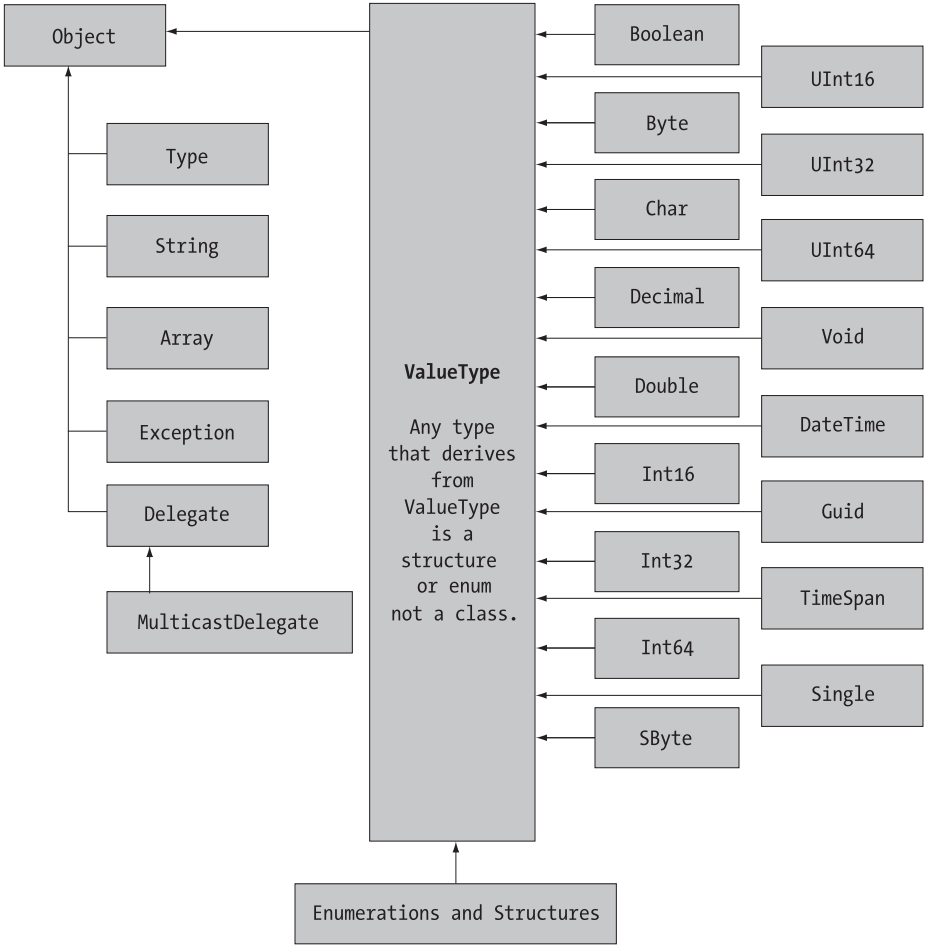


Figure 3-19. *The hierarchy of* `System` *types*

As you can see, each of these types ultimately derives from `System.Object`. Because data types such as `int` are simply shorthand notations for the corresponding system type (in this case, `System.Int32`), the following is perfectly legal syntax:

```
// Remember! A C# int is really a shorthand for System.Int32.
Console.WriteLine(12.GetHashCode());
Console.WriteLine(12.Equals(23));
Console.WriteLine(12.ToString());
Console.WriteLine(12);      // ToString() called automatically.
Console.WriteLine(12.GetType().BaseType);
```

Furthermore, given that all value types are provided with a default constructor, it is permissible to create a system type using the `new` keyword, which sets the variable to its default value. Although it is more cumbersome to use the `new` keyword when creating a `System` data type, the following is syntactically well-formed C#:

```
// These statements are identical.
bool b1 = new bool();    // b1 = false.
bool b2 = false;
```

On a related note, you could also create a system data type using the fully qualified name:

```
// These statements are also semantically identical.
System.Bool b1 = new System.Bool();    // b1 = false.
System.Bool sb2 = false;
```

Experimenting with Numerical Data Types

The numerical types of .NET support `MaxValue` and `MinValue` properties that provide information regarding the range a given type can store. Assume you have created some variables of type `System.UInt16` (an `unsigned short`) and exercised it as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     System.UInt16 myUInt16 = 30000;
     Console.WriteLine("Max for an UInt16 is: {0} ", UInt16.MaxValue);
     Console.WriteLine("Min for an UInt16 is: {0} ", UInt16.MinValue);
     Console.WriteLine("Value is: {0} ", myUInt16);
     Console.WriteLine("I am a: {0} ", myUInt16.GetType());

     // Now in System.UInt16 shorthand (e.g., a ushort).
     ushort myOtherUInt16 = 12000;
     Console.WriteLine("Max for an UInt16 is: {0} ", ushort.MaxValue);
     Console.WriteLine("Min for an UInt16 is: {0} ", ushort.MinValue);
     Console.WriteLine("Value is: {0} ", myOtherUInt16);
     Console.WriteLine("I am a: {0} ", myOtherUInt16.GetType());
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

In addition to the `MinValue`/`MaxValue` properties, a given system type may define further useful members. For example, the `System.Double` type allows you to obtain the values for Epsilon and infinity values:

```
Console.WriteLine("-> double.Epsilon: {0}", double.Epsilon);
Console.WriteLine("-> double.PositiveInfinity: {0}", double.PositiveInfinity);
Console.WriteLine("-> double.NegativeInfinity: {0}", double.NegativeInfinity);
Console.WriteLine("-> double.MaxValue: {0}", double.MaxValue);
Console.WriteLine("-> double.MinValue: {0}",double.MinValue);
```

Members of System.Boolean

Next, consider the `System.Boolean` data type. Unlike C(++), the only valid assignment a C# `bool` can take is from the set {`true` | `false`}. You cannot assign makeshift values (e.g., –1, 0, 1) to a C# `bool`, which (to most programmers) is a welcome change. Given this point, it should be clear that `System.Boolean` does not support a `MinValue`/`MaxValue` property set, but rather `TrueString`/`FalseString`:

```
// No more ad hoc Boolean types in C#!
bool b = 0;        // Illegal!
bool b2 = -1;      // Also illegal!
bool b3 = true;    // No problem.
bool b4 = false;   // No problem.
Console.WriteLine("-> bool.FalseString: {0}", bool.FalseString);
Console.WriteLine("-> bool.TrueString: {0}", bool.TrueString);
```

Members of System.Char

C# textual data is represented by the intrinsic C# string and char data types. All .NET-aware languages map textual data to the same underlying types (System.String and System.Char), both of which are Unicode under the hood.

The System.Char type provides you with a great deal of functionality beyond the ability to hold a single point of character data (which must be placed between single quotes). Using the static methods of System.Char, you are able to determine if a given character is numerical, alphabetical, a point of punctuation, or whatnot. To illustrate, check out the following:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Test the truth of the following statements...
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsDigit('K'): {0}", char.IsDigit('K'));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsDigit('9'): {0}", char.IsDigit('9'));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsLetter('10', 1): {0}", char.IsLetter("10", 1));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsLetter('p'): {0}", char.IsLetter('p'));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsWhiteSpace('Hello There', 5): {0}",
         char.IsWhiteSpace("Hello There", 5));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsWhiteSpace('Hello There', 6): {0}",
         char.IsWhiteSpace("Hello There", 6));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsLetterOrDigit('?'): {0}",
         char.IsLetterOrDigit('?'));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsPunctuation('!'): {0}",
         char.IsPunctuation('!'));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsPunctuation('>'): {0}",
         char.IsPunctuation('>'));
     Console.WriteLine("-> char.IsPunctuation(','): {0}",
         char.IsPunctuation(','));
...
}
```

As you can see, each of these static members of System.Char has two calling conventions: a single character or a string with a numerical index that specified the position of the character to test.

Parsing Values from String Data

Also understand that the .NET data types provide the ability to generate a variable of their underlying type given a textual equivalent (e.g., *parsing*). This technique can be extremely helpful when you wish to convert a bit of user input data (such as a selection from a drop-down list) into a numerical value. Ponder the following parsing logic:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     bool myBool = bool.Parse("True");
     Console.WriteLine("-> Value of myBool: {0}", myBool);
     double myDbl = double.Parse("99.884");
     Console.WriteLine("-> Value of myDbl: {0}", myDbl);
     int myInt = int.Parse("8");
     Console.WriteLine("-> Value of myInt: {0}", myInt);
     char myChar = char.Parse("w");
     Console.WriteLine("-> Value of myChar: {0}\n", myChar);
...
}
```

System.DateTime and System.TimeSpan

To wrap up our examination of core data types, allow me to point out the fact that the `System` namespace defines a few useful data types for which there is no C# keyword—specifically, the `DateTime` and `TimeSpan` structures (I'll leave the investigation of `System.Guid` and `System.Void`, as shown in Figure 3-19, to interested readers).

The `DateTime` type contains data that represents a specific date (month, day, year) and time value, both of which may be formatted in a variety of ways using the supplied members. By way of a simple example, ponder the following statements:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // This constructor takes (year, month, day)
     DateTime dt = new DateTime(2004, 10, 17);

     // What day of the month is this?
     Console.WriteLine("The day of {0} is {1}", dt.Date, dt.DayOfWeek);
     dt.AddMonths(2);  // Month is now December.
     Console.WriteLine("Daylight savings: {0}", dt.IsDaylightSavingTime());
...
}
```

The `TimeSpan` structure allows you to easily define and transform units of time using various members, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // This constructor takes (hours, minutes, seconds)
     TimeSpan ts = new TimeSpan(4, 30, 0);
     Console.WriteLine(ts);

     // Subtract 15 minutes from the current TimeSpan and
     // print the result.
     Console.WriteLine(ts.Subtract(new TimeSpan(0, 15, 0)));
...
}
```

Figure 3-20 shows the output of the `DateTime` and `TimeSpan` statements.

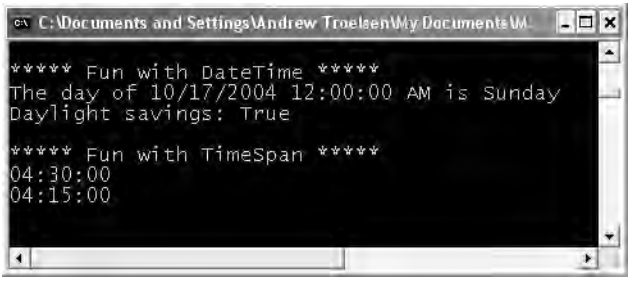

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\M...
***** Fun with DateTime *****
The day of 10/17/2004 12:00:00 AM is Sunday
Daylight savings: True
***** Fun with TimeSpan *****
04:30:00
04:15:00

Figure 3-20. *Working with* `DateTime` *and* `TimeSpan`

■ **Source Code** The DataTypes project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

The System.String Data Type

The C# `string` keyword is a shorthand notation of the `System.String` type, which provides a number of members you would expect from such a utility class. Table 3-12 lists some (but not all) of the interesting members.

Table 3-12. *Select Members of* `System.String`

Member	Meaning in Life
`Length`	This property returns the length of the current string.
`Contains()`	This method is used to determine if the current string object contains a specified string.
`Format()`	This static method is used to format a string literal using other primitives (i.e., numerical data and other strings) and the `{0}` notation examined earlier in this chapter.
`Insert()`	This method is used to receive a copy of the current string that contains newly inserted string data.
`PadLeft()` `PadRight()`	These methods return copies of the current string that has been padded with specific data.
`Remove()` `Replace()`	Use these methods to receive a copy of a string, with modifications (characters removed or replaced).
`Substring()`	This method returns a string that represents a substring of the current string.
`ToCharArray()`	This method returns a character array representing the current string.
`ToUpper()` `ToLower()`	These methods create a copy of a given string in uppercase or lowercase.

Basic String Operations

To illustrate some basic string operations, consider the following `Main()` method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Strings *****");
    string s = "Boy, this is taking a long time.";
    Console.WriteLine("--> s contains 'oy'?: {0}", s.Contains("oy"));
    Console.WriteLine("--> s contains 'Boy'?: {0}", s.Contains("Boy"));
    Console.WriteLine(s.Replace('.', '!'));
    Console.WriteLine(s.Insert(0, "Boy O' "));
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Here, we are creating a `string` type invoking the `Contains()`, `Replace()`, and `Insert()` methods. Figure 3-21 shows the output.

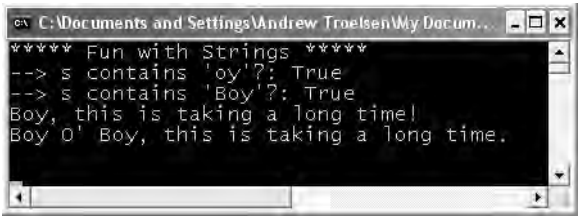

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Docum...
***** Fun with Strings *****
--> s contains 'oy'?: True
--> s contains 'Boy'?: True
Boy, this is taking a long time!
Boy O' Boy, this is taking a long time.

Figure 3-21. *Basic string operations*

You should be aware that although `string` is a reference type, the equality operators (`==` and `!=`) are defined to compare the *value* with the string objects, not the memory to which they refer. Therefore, the following comparison evaluates to true:

```
string s1 = "Hello ";
string s2 = "Hello ";
Console.WriteLine("s1 == s2: {0}", s1 == s2);
```

whereas this comparison evaluates to false:

```
string s1 = "Hello ";
string s2 = "World!";
Console.WriteLine("s1 == s2: {0}", s1 == s2);
```

When you wish to concatenate existing strings into a new string that is the sum of all its parts, C# provides the `+` operator as well as the static `String.Concat()` method. Given this, the following statements are functionally equivalent:

```
// Concatenation of strings.
string newString = s + s1 + s2;
Console.WriteLine("s + s1 + s2 = {0}", newString);
Console.WriteLine("string.Concat(s, s1, s2) = {0}", string.Concat(s, s1, s2));
```

Another helpful feature of the `string` type is the ability to iterate over each individual character using an arraylike syntax. Formally speaking, objects that support arraylike access to their contents make use of an *indexer method*. You'll learn how to build indexers in Chapter 9; however, to illustrate the concept, the following code prints each character of the `s1` string object to the console:

```
// System.String also defines an indexer to access each
// character in the string.
for (int k = 0; k < s1.Length; k++)
     Console.WriteLine("Char {0} is {1}", k, s1[k]);
```

As an alternative to interacting with the type's indexer, the string class can also be used within the C# `foreach` construct. Given that `System.String` is maintaining an array of individual `System.Char` types, the following code also prints each character of `s1` to the console:

```
foreach(char c in s1)
     Console.WriteLine(c);
```

Escape Characters

Like in other C-based languages, in C# string literals may contain various escape characters, which qualify how the character data should be printed to the output stream. Each escape character begins with a backslash, followed by a specific token. In case you are a bit rusty on the meanings behind these escape characters, Table 3-13 lists the more common options.

Table 3-13. *String Literal Escape Characters*

Character	Meaning in Life
\'	Inserts a single quote into a string literal.
\"	Inserts a double quote into a string literal.
\\	Inserts a backslash into a string literal. This can be quite helpful when defining file paths.
\a	Triggers a system alert (beep). For console applications, this can be an audio clue to the user.
\n	Inserts a new line (on Win32 platforms).
\r	Inserts a carriage return.
\t	Inserts a horizontal tab into the string literal.

For example, to print a string that contains a tab between each word, you can make use of the \t escape character:

```
// Literal strings may contain any number of escape characters.
string s3 = "Hello\tThere\tAgain";
Console.WriteLine(s3);
```

As another example, assume you wish to create a string literal that contains quotation marks, another that defines a directory path, and a final string literal that inserts three blank lines after printing the character data. To do so without compiler errors, you would need to make use of the \", \\, and \n escape characters:

```
Console.WriteLine("Everyone loves \"Hello World\"");
Console.WriteLine("C:\\MyApp\\bin\\debug");
Console.WriteLine("All finished.\n\n\n");
```

Working with C# Verbatim Strings

C# introduces the @-prefixed string literal notation termed a *verbatim string*. Using verbatim strings, you disable the processing of a literal's escape characters. This can be most useful when working with strings representing directory and network paths. Therefore, rather than making use of \\ escape characters, you can simply write the following:

```
// The following string is printed verbatim
// thus, all escape characters are displayed.
Console.WriteLine(@"C:\MyApp\bin\debug");
```

Also note that verbatim strings can be used to preserve white space for strings that flow over multiple lines:

```
// White space is preserved with verbatim strings.
string myLongString = @"This is a very
     very
          very
               long string";
Console.WriteLine(myLongString);
```

You can also insert a double quote into a literal string by doubling the " token, for example:

```
Console.WriteLine(@"Cerebus said ""Darrr! Pret-ty sun-sets""");
```

The Role of System.Text.StringBuilder

While the `string` type is perfect when you wish to represent basic string variables (first name, SSN, etc.), it can be inefficient if you are building a program that makes heavy use of textual data. The reason has to do with a very important fact regarding .NET strings: the value of a string cannot be modified once established. C# strings are immutable.

On the surface, this sounds like a flat-out lie, given that we are always assigning new values to string variables. However, if you examine the methods of `System.String`, you notice that the methods that *seem* to internally modify a string in fact return a modified *copy* of the original string. For example, when you call `ToUpper()` on a string object, you are not modifying the underlying buffer of an existing string object, but receive a new string object in uppercase form:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Make changes to strFixed?  Nope!
     System.String strFixed = "This is how I began life";
     Console.WriteLine(strFixed);
     string upperVersion = strFixed.ToUpper();
     Console.WriteLine(strFixed);
     Console.WriteLine("{0}\n\n", upperVersion);
...
}
```

In a similar vein, when you assign an existing string object to a new value, you have actually allocated a *new* string in the process (the original string object will eventually be garbage collected). A similar process occurs with string concatenation.

To help reduce the amount of string copying, the `System.Text` namespace defines a class named `StringBuilder` (first seen during our examination of `System.Object` earlier in this chapter). Unlike `System.String`, `StringBuilder` provides you direct access to the underlying buffer. Like `System.String`, `StringBuilder` provides numerous members that allow you to append, format, insert, and remove data from the object (consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details).

When you create a `StringBuilder` object, you may specify (via a constructor argument) the initial number of characters the object can contain. If you do not do so, the default capacity of a `StringBuilder` is 16. In either case, if you add more character data to a `StringBuilder` than it is able to hold, the buffer is resized on the fly.

Here is an example of working with this class type:

```
using System;
using System.Text;     // StringBuilder lives here.

class StringApp
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          StringBuilder myBuffer = new StringBuilder("My string data");
          Console.WriteLine("Capacity of this StringBuilder: {0}",
               myBuffer.Capacity);
          myBuffer.Append(" contains some numerical data: ");
          myBuffer.AppendFormat("{0}, {1}.", 44, 99);
          Console.WriteLine("Capacity of this StringBuilder: {0}",
               myBuffer.Capacity);
          Console.WriteLine(myBuffer);
     }
}
```

Now, do understand that in many cases, `System.String` will be your textual object of choice. For most applications, the overhead associated with returning modified copies of character data will be negligible. However, if you are building a text-intensive application (such as a word processor program), you will most likely find that using `System.Text.StringBuilder` improves performance.

■ **Source Code** The Strings project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

.NET Array Types

Formally speaking, an *array* is a collection of data points, of the *same* defined data type, that are accessed using a numerical index. Arrays are references types and derive from a common base class named `System.Array`. By default, .NET arrays always have a lower bound of zero, although it is possible to create an array with an arbitrary lower bound using the static `System.Array.CreateInstance()` method.

C# arrays can be declared in a handful of ways. First of all, if you are creating an array whose values will be specified at a later time (perhaps due to yet-to-be-obtained user input), specify the size of the array using square brackets (`[]`) at the time of its allocation, for example:

```
// Assign a string array containing 3 elements {0 - 2}
string[] booksOnCOM;
booksOnCOM = new string[3];

// Initialize a 100 item string array, numbered {0 - 99}
string[] booksOnDotNet = new string[100];
```

Once you have declared an array, you can make use of the indexer syntax to fill each item with a value:

```
// Create, populate, and print an array of three strings.
string[] booksOnCOM;
booksOnCOM = new string[3];
booksOnCOM[0] = "Developer's Workshop to COM and ATL 3.0";
booksOnCOM[1] = "Inside COM";
booksOnCOM[2] = "Inside ATL";
foreach (string s in booksOnCOM)
     Console.WriteLine(s);
```

As a shorthand notation, if you know an array's values at the time of declaration, you may specify these values within curly brackets. Note that in this case, the array size is optional (as it is calculated on the fly), as is the `new` keyword. Thus, the following declarations are identical:

```
// Shorthand array declaration (values must be known at time of declaration).
int[] n = new int[] { 20, 22, 23, 0 };
int[] n3 = { 20, 22, 23, 0 };
```

There is one final manner in which you can create an array type:

```
int[] n2 = new int[4] { 20, 22, 23, 0 };  // 4 elements, {0 - 3}
```

In this case, the numeric value specified represents the *number of elements* in the array, not the value of the upper bound. If there is a mismatch between the declared size and the number of initializers, you are issued a compile time error.

Regardless of how you declare an array, be aware that the elements in a .NET array are automatically set to their respective default values until you indicate otherwise. Thus, if you have an array of

numerical types, each member is set to 0 (or 0.0 in the case of floating-point numbers), objects are set to null, and Boolean types are set to false.

Arrays As Parameters (and Return Values)

Once you have created an array, you are free to pass it as a parameter and receive it as a member return value. For example, the following `PrintArray()` method takes an incoming array of strings and prints each member to the console, while the `GetStringArray()` method populates an array and returns it to the caller:

```
static void PrintArray(int[] myInts)
{
    for(int i = 0; i < myInts.Length; i++)
        Console.WriteLine("Item {0} is {1}", i, myInts[i]);
}

static string[] GetStringArray()
{
    string[] theStrings = {  "Hello", "from", "GetStringArray" };
    return theStrings;
}
```

These methods may be invoked from a `Main()` method as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     int[] ages = {20, 22, 23, 0} ;
     PrintArray(ages);
     string[] strs = GetStringArray();
     foreach(string s in strs)
        Console.WriteLine(s);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Working with Multidimensional Arrays

In addition to the single-dimension arrays you have seen thus far, C# also supports two varieties of multidimensional arrays. The first of these is termed a *rectangular array*, which is simply an array of multiple dimensions, where each row is of the same length. To declare and fill a multidimensional rectangular array, proceed as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // A rectangular MD array.
    int[,] myMatrix;
    myMatrix = new int[6,6];

    // Populate (6 * 6) array.
    for(int i = 0; i < 6; i++)
        for(int j = 0; j < 6; j++)
            myMatrix[i, j] = i * j;

    // Print (6 * 6) array.
    for(int i = 0; i < 6; i++)
```

```
    {
        for(int j = 0; j < 6; j++)
           Console.Write(myMatrix[i, j] + "\t");
           Console.WriteLine();
    }
...
}
```

Figure 3-22 shows the output (note the rectangular nature of the array).

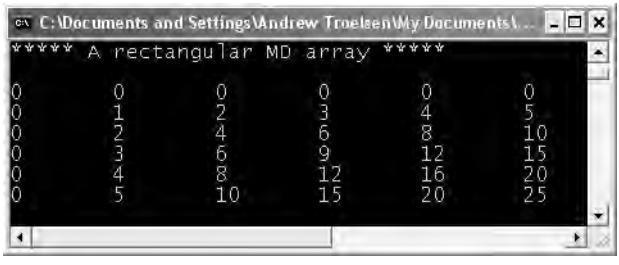

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\...
***** A rectangular MD array *****
0 0 0 0 0 0
0 1 2 3 4 5
0 2 4 6 8 10
0 3 6 9 12 15
0 4 8 12 16 20
0 5 10 15 20 25

Figure 3-22. *A multidimensional array*

The second type of multidimensional array is termed a *jagged array*. As the name implies, jagged arrays contain some number of inner arrays, each of which may have a unique upper limit, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // A jagged MD array (i.e., an array of arrays).
    // Here we have an array of 5 different arrays.
    int[][] myJagArray = new int[5][];

    // Create the jagged array.
    for (int i = 0; i < myJagArray.Length; i++)
        myJagArray[i] = new int[i + 7];

    // Print each row (remember, each element is defaulted to zero!)
    for(int i = 0; i < 5; i++)
    {
        Console.Write("Length of row {0}  is {1} :\t", i, myJagArray[i].Length);
        for(int j = 0; j < myJagArray[i].Length; j++)
            Console.Write(myJagArray[i][j] + " ");
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
}
```

Figure 3-23 shows the output (note the jaggedness of the array).

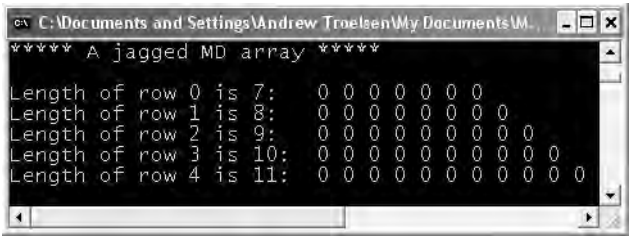

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\M...
***** A jagged MD array *****
Length of row 0 is 7: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Length of row 1 is 8: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Length of row 2 is 9: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Length of row 3 is 10: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Length of row 4 is 11: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Figure 3-23. *A jagged array*

Now that you understand how to build and populate C# arrays, let's turn our attention to the ultimate base class of any array: `System.Array`.

The System.Array Base Class

Every .NET array you create is automatically derived from `System.Array`. This class defines a number of helpful methods that make working with arrays much more palatable. Table 3-14 gives a rundown of some (but not all) of the more interesting members.

Table 3-14. *Select Members of* `System.Array`

Member	Meaning in Life
`BinarySearch()`	This static method searches a (previously sorted) array for a given item. If the array is composed of custom types you have created, the type in question must implement the `IComparer` interface (see Chapter 7) to engage in a binary search.
`Clear()`	This static method sets a range of elements in the array to empty values (0 for value types; null for reference types).
`CopyTo()`	This method is used to copy elements from the source array into the destination array.
`Length`	This read-only property is used to determine the number of elements in an array.
`Rank`	This property returns the number of dimensions of the current array.
`Reverse()`	This static method reverses the contents of a one-dimensional array.
`Sort()`	This method sorts a one-dimensional array of intrinsic types. If the elements in the array implement the `IComparer` interface, you can also sort your custom types (again, see Chapter 7).

Let's see some of these members in action. The following code makes use of the static `Reverse()` and `Clear()` methods (and the `Length` property) to pump out some information about an array of strings named `firstNames` to the console:

```
// Create some string arrays and exercise some System.Array members.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Array of strings.
    string[] firstNames = {  "Steve", "Dominic", "Swallow", "Baldy"} ;

    // Print names as declared.
```

```
    Console.WriteLine("Here is the array:");
    for(int i = 0; i < firstNames.Length; i++)
        Console.Write("Name: {0}\t", firstNames[i]);
    Console.WriteLine("\n");

    // Reverse array and print.
    Array.Reverse(firstNames);
    Console.WriteLine("Here is the array once reversed:");
    for(int i = 0; i < firstNames.Length; i++)
        Console.Write("Name: {0}\t", firstNames[i]);
    Console.WriteLine("\n");

    // Clear out all but Baldy.
    Console.WriteLine("Cleared out all but Baldy...");
    Array.Clear(firstNames, 1, 3);
    for(int i = 0; i < firstNames.Length; i++)
        Console.Write("Name: {0}\t", firstNames[i]);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Do note that when you call the `Clear()` method on an array type, the items are *not* compacted into a smaller array. Rather, the emptied elements are simply set to default values. If you require a dynamically allocated container type, you will need to check out the types within the `System.Collections` namespace (among others).

■ **Source Code** The Arrays application is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Understanding C# Nullable Types

As you have seen, CLR data types have a fixed range. For example, the `System.Boolean` data type can be assigned a value from the set `{true, false}`. As of .NET 2.0, it is now possible to create *nullable* data types. Simply put, a nullable type can represent all the values of its underlying type, plus the value `null`. Thus, if we declare a nullable `System.Boolean`, it could be assigned a value from the set `{true, false, null}`. This is significant, as non-nullable value types *cannot* be assigned the value `null`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Compiler errors!
    // Value types cannot be set to null!
    bool myBool = null;
    int myInt = null;
}
```

To define a nullable variable type, the question mark symbol (`?`) is suffixed to the underlying data type. Do note that this syntax is only legal when applied to value types or an array of value types. If you attempt to create a nullable reference type (including strings), you are issued a compile-time error. Like a non-nullable variable, local nullable variables must be assigned an initial value:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Define some local nullable types.
    int? nullableInt = 10;
    double? nullableDouble = 3.14;
    bool? nullableBool = null;
```

```
    char? nullableChar = 'a';
    int?[] arrayOfNullableInts = new int?[10];

    // Error!  Strings are reference types!
    string? s = "oops";
}
```

In C#, the ? suffix notation is a shorthand for creating a variable of the generic `System.Nullable<T>` structure type. Although we will not examine generics until Chapter 10, it is important to understand that the `System.Nullable<T>` type provides a set of members that all nullable types can make use of. For example, you are able to programmatically discover if the nullable variable indeed has been assigned a `null` value using the `HasValue` property or the `!=` operator. The assigned value of a nullable type may be obtained directly or via the `Value` property.

Working with Nullable Types

Nullable data types can be particularly useful when you are interacting with databases, given that columns in a data table may be intentionally empty (e.g., undefined). To illustrate, assume the following class, which simulates the process of accessing a database that has a table containing two columns that may be null. Note that the `GetIntFromDatabase()` method is not assigning a value to the nullable integer member variable, while `GetBoolFromDatabase()` is assigning a valid value to the `bool?` member:

```
class DatabaseReader
{
    // Nullable data field.
    public int? numbericValue;
    public bool? boolValue = true;

    // Note the nullable return type.
    public int? GetIntFromDatabase()
    { return numbericValue; }

    // Note the nullable return type.
    public bool? GetBoolFromDatabase()
    { return boolValue; }
}
```

Now, assume the following `Main()` method, which invokes each member of the `DatabaseReader` class, and discovers the assigned values using the `HasValue` and `Value` members as well as a C#-specific syntax:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Nullable Data *****\n");
    DatabaseReader dr = new DatabaseReader();

    // Get int from 'database'.
    int? i = dr.GetIntFromDatabase();
    if (i.HasValue)
        Console.WriteLine("Value of 'i' is: {0}", i);
    else
        Console.WriteLine("Value of 'i' is undefined.");
```

```
    // Get bool from 'database'.
    bool? b = dr.GetBoolFromDatabase();
    if (b != null)
        Console.WriteLine("Value of 'b' is: {0}", b);
    else
        Console.WriteLine("Value of 'b' is undefined.");
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

The ?? Operator

The final aspect of nullable types to be aware of is that they can make use of the C# 2005–specific `??` operator. This operator allows you to assign a value to a nullable type if the retrieved value is in fact `null`. For this example, assume you wish to assign a local nullable integer to 100 if the value returned from `GetIntFromDatabase()` is `null` (of course, this method is programmed to *always* return `null`, but I am sure you get the general idea):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Nullable Data *****\n");
    DatabaseReader dr = new DatabaseReader();
...
    // If the value from GetIntFromDatabase() is null,
    // assign local variable to 100.
    int? myData = dr.GetIntFromDatabase() ?? 100;
    Console.WriteLine("Value of myData: {0}", myData);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

■ **Source Code** The NullableType application is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Defining Custom Namespaces

Up to this point, you have been building small test programs leveraging existing namespaces in the .NET universe (`System` in particular). When you build your own custom applications, it can be very helpful to group your related types into custom namespaces. In C#, this is accomplished using the `namespace` keyword.

Assume you are developing a collection of geometric classes named `Square`, `Circle`, and `Hexagon`. Given their similarities, you would like to group them all together into a common custom namespace. You have two basic approaches. First, you may choose to define each class within a single file (`shapeslib.cs`) as follows:

```
// shapeslib.cs
using System;

namespace MyShapes
{
     // Circle class.
     class Circle{  /* Interesting methods... */ }
     // Hexagon class.
     class Hexagon{ /* More interesting methods... */ }
     // Square class.
     class Square{  /* Even more interesting methods... */ }
}
```

Notice how the MyShapes namespace acts as the conceptual "container" of these types. Alternatively, you can split a single namespace into multiple C# files. To do so, simply wrap the given class definitions in the same namespace:

```
// circle.cs
using System;

namespace MyShapes
{
     // Circle class.
     class Circle{ }
}

// hexagon.cs
using System;

namespace MyShapes
{
     // Hexagon class.
     class Hexagon{ }
}

// square.cs
using System;

namespace MyShapes
{
     // Square class.
     class Square{ }
}
```

As you already know, when another namespace wishes to use objects within a distinct namespace, the using keyword can be used as follows:

```
// Make use of types defined the MyShape namespace.
using System;
using MyShapes;

namespace MyApp
{
     class ShapeTester
     {
         static void Main(string[] args)
         {
              Hexagon h = new Hexagon();
              Circle c = new Circle();
              Square s = new Square();
         }
    }
}
```

A Type's Fully Qualified Name

Technically speaking, you are not required to make use of the C# using keyword when declaring a type defined in an external namespace. You could make use of the fully qualified name of the type, which as you recall from Chapter 1 is the type's name prefixed with the defining namespace:

```
// Note we are not 'using' MyShapes anymore.
using System;

namespace MyApp
{
     class ShapeTester
     {
         static void Main(string[] args)
         {
              MyShapes.Hexagon h = new MyShapes.Hexagon();
              MyShapes.Circle c = new MyShapes.Circle();
              MyShapes.Square s = new MyShapes.Square();
         }
    }
}
```

Typically there is no need to use a fully qualified name. Not only does it require a greater number of keystrokes, but also it makes no difference whatsoever in terms of code size or execution speed. In fact, in CIL code, types are *always* defined with the fully qualified name. In this light, the C# `using` keyword is simply a typing time-saver.

However, fully qualified names can be very helpful (and sometimes necessary) to avoid name clashes that may occur when using multiple namespaces that contain identically named types. Assume a new namespace termed `My3DShapes`, which defines three classes capable of rendering a shape in stunning 3D:

```
// Another shapes namespace...
using System;

namespace My3DShapes
{
     // 3D Circle class.
     class Circle{ }
     // 3D Hexagon class
     class Hexagon{ }
     // 3D Square class
     class Square{ }
}
```

If you update `ShapeTester` as was done here, you are issued a number of compile-time errors, because both namespaces define identically named types:

```
// Ambiguities abound!
using System;
using MyShapes;
using My3DShapes;

namespace MyApp
{
     class ShapeTester
     {
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               // Which namespace do I reference?
               Hexagon h = new Hexagon();    // Compiler error!
               Circle c = new Circle();      // Compiler error!
               Square s = new Square();      // Compiler error!
          }
     }
```

The ambiguity can be resolved using the type's fully qualified name:

```
// We have now resolved the ambiguity.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     My3DShapes.Hexagon h = new My3DShapes.Hexagon();
     My3DShapes.Circle c = new My3DShapes.Circle();
     MyShapes.Square s = new MyShapes.Square();
}
```

Defining using Aliases

The C# `using` keyword can also be used to create an *alias* to a type's fully qualified name. When you do so, you are able to define a token that is substituted with the type's full name at compile time, for example:

```
using System;
using MyShapes;
using My3DShapes;

// Resolve the ambiguity using a custom alias.
using The3DHexagon = My3DShapes.Hexagon;

namespace MyApp
{
    class ShapeTester
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
             // This is really creating a My3DShapes.Hexagon type.
             The3DHexagon h2 = new The3DHexagon();
...
        }
    }
}
```

This alternative `using` syntax can also be used to create an alias to a lengthy namespace. One of the longer namespaces in the base class library would have to be `System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Binary`, which contains a member named `BinaryFormatter`. If you wish, you could create an instance of the `BinaryFormatter` as so:

```
using MyAlias = System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Binary;

namespace MyApp
{
    class ShapeTester
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            MyAlias.BinaryFormatter b = new MyAlias.BinaryFormatter();
        }
    }
}
```

as well with a traditional `using` directive:

```
using System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Binary;
```

```
namespace MyApp
{
    class ShapeTester
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            BinaryFormatter b = new BinaryFormatter();
        }
    }
}
```

■ **Note** C# now provides a mechanism that can be used to resolve name clashes between identically named *namespaces* using the namespace alias qualifier (`::`) and "global" token. Thankfully, this type of name collision is rare. If you require more information regarding this topic, look up my article "Working with the C# 2.0 Command Line Compiler" from `http://msdn.microsoft.com`.

Creating Nested Namespaces

When organizing your types, you are free to define namespaces within other namespaces. The .NET base class libraries do so in numerous places to provide an even deeper level of type organization. For example, the `Collections` namespace is nested within `System`, to yield `System.Collections`. If you wish to create a root namespace that contains the existing `My3DShapes` namespace, you can update your code as follows:

```
// Nesting a namespace.
namespace Chapter3
{
     namespace My3DShapes
     {
          // 3D Circle class.
          class Circle{ }
          // 3D Hexagon class
          class Hexagon{ }
          // 3D Square class
          class Square{ }
     }
}
```

In many cases, the role of a root namespace is simply to provide a further level of scope, and therefore may not define any types directly within its scope (as in the case of the `Chapter3` namespace). If this is the case, a nested namespace can be defined using the following compact form:

```
// Nesting a namespace (take two).
namespace Chapter3.My3DShapes
{
    // 3D Circle class.
    class Circle{ }
    // 3D Hexagon class
    class Hexagon{ }
    // 3D Square class
    class Square{ }
}
```

Given that you have now nested the `My3DShapes` namespace within the `Chapter3` root namespace, you need to update any existing using directives and type aliases:

```
using Chapter3.My3DShapes;
using The3DHexagon = Chapter3.My3DShapes.Hexagon;
```

The "Default Namespace" of Visual Studio 2005

On a final namespace-related note, it is worth pointing out that by default, when you create a new C# project using Visual Studio 2005, the name of your application's default namespace will be identical to the project name. From this point on, when you insert new items using the Project ➤ Add New Item menu selection, types will automatically be wrapped within the default namespace. If you wish to change the name of the default namespace (e.g., to be your company name), simply access the Default namespace option using the Application tab of the project's Properties window (see Figure 3-24).

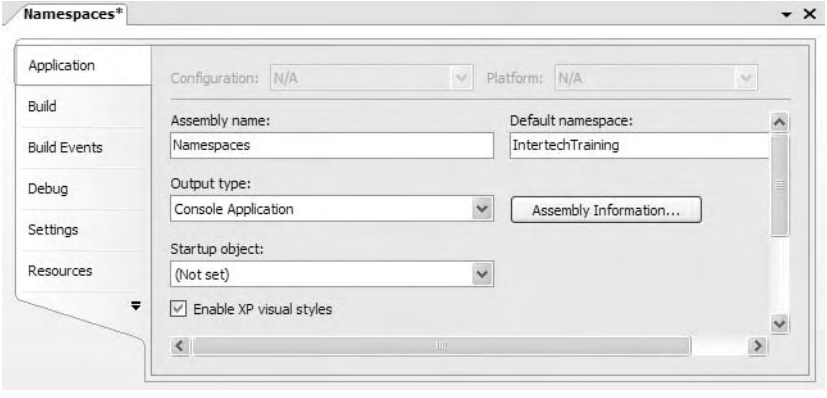


Figure 3-24. *Configuring the default namespace*

With this update, any new item inserted into the project will be wrapped within the `IntertechTraining` namespace (and, obviously, if another namespace wishes to use these types, the correct `using` directive must be applied).

■ **Source Code** The Namespaces project is located under the Chapter 3 subdirectory.

Summary

This (rather lengthy) chapter exposed you to the numerous core aspects of the C# programming language and the .NET platform. The focus was to examine the constructs that will be commonplace in any application you may be interested in building.

As you have seen, all intrinsic C# data types alias a corresponding type in the `System` namespace. Each system type has a number of members that provide a programmatic manner to obtain the range of the type. Furthermore, you learned the basic process of building C# class types and examined the various parameter-passing conventions, value types and reference types, and the role of the mighty `System.Object`.

You also examined various aspects of the CLR that place an OO spin on common programming constructs, such as arrays, strings, structures, and enumerations. In addition, this chapter illustrated the concept of boxing and unboxing. This simple mechanism allows you to easily move between value-based and reference-based data types. Finally, the chapter wrapped up by explaining the role of nullable data types and the construction of custom namespaces.

CHAPTER 4

Object-Oriented Programming with C# 2.0

In the previous chapter, you were introduced to a number of core constructs of the C# language and the .NET platform as well as select types within the `System` namespace. Here, you will spend your time digging deeper into the details of object-based development. I begin with a review of the famed "pillars of OOP" and then examine exactly how C# contends with the notions of encapsulation, inheritance, and polymorphism. This will equip you with the knowledge you need in order to build custom class hierarchies.

During this process, you examine some new constructs such as type properties, versioning type members, "sealed" classes, and XML code documentation syntax. Do be aware that the information presented here will serve as the foundation for more advanced class design techniques (such as overloaded operators, events, and custom conversion routines) examined in later chapters.

By way of a friendly invitation, even if you are currently comfortable with the constructs of object-oriented programming using other languages, I would encourage you to pound out the code examples found within this chapter. As you will see, C# does place a new spin on many common OO techniques.

Understanding the C# Class Type

If you have been "doing objects" in another programming language, you are no doubt aware of the role of class definitions. Formally, a class is nothing more than a custom user-defined type (UDT) that is composed of field data (sometimes termed *member variables*) and functions (often called *methods* in OO speak) that act on this data. The set of field data collectively represents the "state" of a class instance.

The power of object-oriented languages is that by grouping data and functionality in a single UDT, you are able to model your software types after real-world entities. For example, assume you are interested in modeling a generic employee for a payroll system. At minimum, you may wish to build a class that maintains the name, current pay, and employee ID for each worker. In addition, the `Employee` class defines one method, named `GiveBonus()`, which increases an individual's current pay by some amount, and another, named `DisplayStats()`, which prints out the state data for this individual. Figure 4-1 illustrates the `Employee` class type.

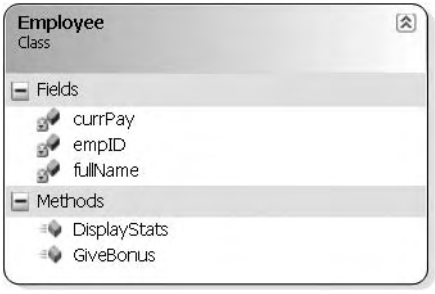


Figure 4-1. *The* `Employee` *class type*

As you recall from Chapter 3, C# classes can define any number of *constructors*. These special class methods provide a simple way for an object user to create an instance of a given class with an initial look and feel. Every C# class is initially provided with a *default constructor*, which by definition never takes arguments. In addition to the default constructor, you are also free to define as many custom constructors as you feel are necessary.

To get the ball rolling, here is our first crack at the `Employee` class (we will add more functionality throughout the chapter):

```
// The initial Employee class definition.
namespace Employees
{
     public class Employee
     {
          // Field data.
          private string fullName;
          private int empID;
          private float currPay;

          // Constructors.
          public Employee(){ }
          public Employee(string fullName, int empID, float currPay)
          {
               this.fullName = fullName;
               this.empID = empID;
               this.currPay = currPay;
          }

          // Bump the pay for this employee.
          public void GiveBonus(float amount)
          {  currPay += amount; }

          // Show current state of this object.
          public void DisplayStats()
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Name: {0} ", fullName);
               Console.WriteLine("Pay: {0} ", currPay);
               Console.WriteLine("ID: {0} ", empID);
          }
     }
}
```

Notice the empty implementation of the default constructor for the `Employee` class:

```
public class Employee
{
...
     public Employee(){ }
...
}
```

Like C++ and Java, if you choose to define custom constructors in a class definition, the default constructor is *silently removed*. Therefore, if you wish to allow the object user to create an instance of your class as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Calls the default constructor.
     Employee e = new Employee();
}
```

you must explicitly redefine the default constructor for your class (as we have done here). If you do not, you will receive a compiler error when creating an instance of your class type using the default constructor. In any case, the following `Main()` method creates a few `Employee` objects using our custom three-argument constructor:

```
// Make some Employee objects.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Employee e = new Employee("Joe", 80, 30000);
     Employee e2;
     e2 = new Employee("Beth", 81, 50000);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Understanding Method Overloading

Like other object-oriented languages, C# allows a type to *overload* various methods. Simply put, when a class has a set of identically named members that differ by the number (or type) of parameters, the member in question is said to be *overloaded*. In the `Employee` class, you have overloaded the class constructor, given that you have provided two definitions that differ only by the parameter set:

```
public class Employee
{
...
     // Overloaded constructors.
     public Employee(){ }
     public Employee(string fullName, int empID, float currPay){...}
...
}
```

Constructors, however, are not the only members that may be overloaded for a type. By way of example, assume you have a class named `Triangle` that supports an overloaded `Draw()` method. By doing so, you allow the object user to render the image using various input parameters:

```
public class Triangle
{
    // The overloaded Draw() method.
    public void Draw(int x, int y, int height, int width) {...}
    public void Draw(float x, float y, float height, float width) {...}
    public void Draw(Point upperLeft, Point bottomRight) {...}
    public void Draw(Rect r) {...}
}
```

If C# did not support method overloading, you would be forced to create four uniquely named members, which, as you can see, is far from ideal:

```
public class Triangle
{
    // Yuck...
    public void DrawWithInts(int x, int y, int height, int width) {...}
    public void DrawWIthFloats(float x, float y, float height, float width) {...}
    public void DrawWithPoints(Point upperLeft, Point bottomRight) {...}
    public void DrawWithRect(Rect r) {...}
}
```

Again, remember that when you are overloading a member, the return type alone is not unique enough. Thus, the following is illegal:

```
public class Triangle
{
    ...
    // Error! Cannot overload methods
    // based solely on return values!
    public float GetX() {...}
    public int GetX() {...}
}
```

Self-Reference in C# Using this

Next, note that the custom constructor of the `Employee` class makes use of the C# `this` keyword:

```
// Explicitly use "this" to resolve name-clash.
public Employee(string fullName, int empID, float currPay)
{
     // Assign the incoming params to my state data.
     this.fullName = fullName;
     this.empID = empID;
     this.currPay = currPay;
}
```

This particular C# keyword is used when you wish to explicitly reference the fields and members of the *current object*. The reason you made use of `this` in your custom constructor was to avoid clashes between the parameter names and names of your internal state variables. Of course, another approach would be to change the names for each parameter and avoid the name clash altogether:

```
// When there is no name clash, "this" is assumed.
public Employee(string name, int id, float pay)
{
     fullName = name;
     empID = id;
     currPay = pay;
}
```

In this case, we have no need to explicitly prefix the `this` keyword to the `Employee`'s member variables, because we have removed the name clash. The compiler can resolve the scope of these member variables using what is known as an *implict* `this`. Simply put, when your class references its own field data and member variables (in an unambiguous manner), `this` is assumed. Therefore, the previous constructor logic is functionally identical to the following:

```
public Employee(string name, int id, float pay)
{
     this.fullName = name;
```

```
     this.empID = id;
     this.currPay = pay;
}
```

■ **Note** Static members of a type cannot make use of the `this` keyword within its method scope. This fact should make some sense, as static member functions operate on the class (not object) level. At the class level, there is no `this`!

Forwarding Constructor Calls Using this

Another use of the `this` keyword is to force one constructor to call another in order to avoid redundant member initialization logic. Consider the following update to the `Employee` class:

```
public class Employee
{
...
     public Employee(string fullName, int empID, float currPay)
     {
          this.fullName = fullName;
          this.empID = empID;
          this.currPay = currPay;
     }

     // If the user calls this ctor, forward to the 3-arg version.
     public Employee(string fullName)
          : this(fullName, IDGenerator.GetNewEmpID(), 0.0F) { }
...
}
```

This iteration of the `Employee` class defines two custom constructors, the second of which requires a single parameter (the individual's name). However, to fully construct a new `Employee`, you want to ensure you have a proper ID and rate of pay. Assume you have created a custom class (`IDGenerator`) that defines a static method named `GetNewEmpID()`, which generates a new employee ID (in some way or another). Once you gather the correct set of startup parameters, you forward the creation request to the alternate three-argument constructor.

If you did not forward the call, you would need to add redundant code to each constructor:

```
// currPay automatically set to 0.0F via default values.
public Employee(string fullName)
{
     this.fullName = fullName;
     this.empID = IDGenerator.GetNewEmpID();
}
```

Understand that using the `this` keyword to forward constructor calls is not mandatory. However, when you make use of this technique, you do tend to end up with a more manitainable and concise class definition. In fact, using this technique you can simplify your programming tasks, as the real work is delegated to a single constructor (typically the constructor that has the most parameters), while the other constructors simply "pass the buck."

Defining the Public Interface of a Class

Once you have established a class's internal state data and constructor set, your next step is to flesh out the details of the *public interface* to the class. The term refers to the set of members that are directly accessible from an object variable via the dot operator.

From the class builder's point of view, the public interface is any item declared in a class using the `public` keyword. Beyond field data and constructors, the public interface of a class may be populated by numerous members, including the following:

- *Methods*: Named units of work that model some behavior of a class
- *Properties*: Traditional accessor and mutator functions in disguise
- *Constants/Read-only fields*: Field data that cannot be changed after assignment (see Chapter 3)

■ **Note** As you will see later in this chapter, nested type definitions may also appear on a type's public interface. Furthermore, as you will see in Chapter 8, the public interface of a class may also be configured to support events.

Given that our `Employee` currently defines two public methods (`GiveBonus()` and `DisplayStats()`), we are able to interact with the public interface as follows:

```
// Interact with the public interface of the Employee class type.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** The Employee Type at Work *****\n");
     Employee e = new Employee("Joe", 80, 30000);
     e.GiveBonus(200);
     e.DisplayStats();

     Employee e2;
     e2 = new Employee("Beth", 81, 50000);
     e2.GiveBonus(1000);
     e2.DisplayStats();
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

If you were to run the application as it now stands, you would find the output shown in Figure 4-2.

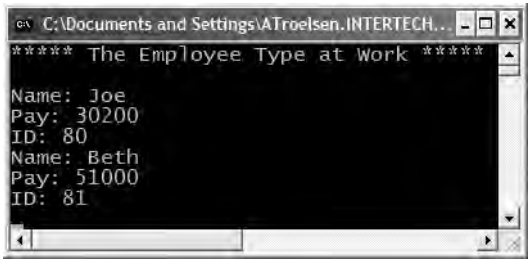


Figure 4-2. *The* `Employee` *class type at work*

At this point we have created a very simple class type with a minimal public interface. Before we move ahead with more complex examples, let's take a moment to review the cornerstones of object-oriented programming (we will return to the `Employee` type shortly).

Reviewing the Pillars of OOP

All object-oriented languages contend with three core principles of object-oriented programming, often called the famed "pillars of OOP."

- *Encapsulation*: How does this language hide an object's internal implementation?
- *Inheritance*: How does this language promote code reuse?
- *Polymorphism*: How does this language let you treat related objects in a similar way?

Before digging into the syntactic details of each pillar, it is important you understand the basic role of each. Therefore, here is a brisk, high-level rundown, just to clear off any cobwebs you may have acquired between project deadlines.

Encapsulation

The first pillar of OOP is called *encapsulation*. This trait boils down to the language's ability to hide unnecessary implementation details from the object user. For example, assume you are using a class named `DatabaseReader` that has two methods named `Open()` and `Close()`:

```
// DatabaseReader encapsulates the details of database manipulation.
DatabaseReader dbObj = new DatabaseReader();

dbObj.Open(@"C:\Employees.mdf");
     // Do something with database...
dbObj.Close();
```

The fictitious `DatabaseReader` class has encapsulated the inner details of locating, loading, manipulating, and closing the data file. Object users love encapsulation, as this pillar of OOP keeps programming tasks simpler. There is no need to worry about the numerous lines of code that are working behind the scenes to carry out the work of the `DatabaseReader` class. All you do is create an instance and send the appropriate messages (e.g., "open the file named Employees.mdf located on my C drive").

Another aspect of encapsulation is the notion of data protection. Ideally, an object's state data should be defined as *private* rather than *public* (as was the case in previous chapters). In this way, the outside world must "ask politely" in order to change or obtain the underlying value.

Inheritance

The next pillar of OOP, inheritance, boils down to the language's ability to allow you to build new class definitions based on existing class definitions. In essence, inheritance allows you to extend the behavior of a base (or *parent*) class by enabling a subclass to inherit core functionality (also called a *derived class* or *child class*). Figure 4-3 illustrates the "is-a" relationship.

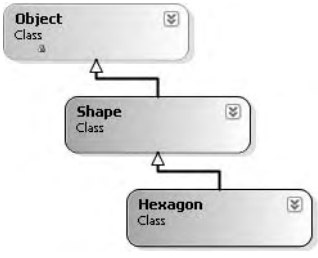


Figure 4-3. *The "is-a" relationship*

You can read this diagram as "A hexagon is-a shape that is-an object." When you have classes related by this form of inheritance, you establish "is-a" relationships between types. The "is-a" relationship is often termed *classical inheritance*.

Recall from Chapter 3 that `System.Object` is the ultimate base class in any .NET hierarchy. Here, the `Shape` class extends `Object`. You can assume that `Shape` defines some number of properties, fields, methods, and events that are common to all shapes. The `Hexagon` class extends `Shape` and inherits the functionality defined by `Shape` and `Object`, in addition to defining its own set of members (whatever they may be).

There is another form of code reuse in the world of OOP: the containment/delegation model (also known as the "has-a" relationship). This form of reuse is not used to establish base/subclass relationships. Rather, a given class can define a member variable of another class and expose part or all of its functionality to the outside world.

For example, if you are modeling an automobile, you might wish to express the idea that a car "has-a" radio. It would be illogical to attempt to derive the `Car` class from a `Radio`, or vice versa. (A `Car` "is-a" `Radio`? I think not!) Rather, you have two independent classes working together, where the containing class creates and exposes the contained class's functionality:

```
public class Radio
{
     public void Power(bool turnOn)
     { Console.WriteLine("Radio on: {0}", turnOn);}
}

public class Car
{
    // Car "has-a" Radio.
    private Radio myRadio = new Radio();

    public void TurnOnRadio(bool onOff)
    {
        // Delegate to inner object.
        myRadio.Power(onOff);
    }
}
```

Here, the containing type (`Car`) is responsible for creating the contained object (`Radio`). If the `Car` wishes to make the `Radio`'s behavior accessible from a `Car` instance, it must extend its own public interface with some set of functions that operate on the contained type. Notice that the object user has no clue that the `Car` class is making use of an inner `Radio` object:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Call is forward to Radio internally.
     Car viper = new Car();
     viper.TurnOnRadio(true);
}
```

Polymorphism

The final pillar of OOP is *polymorphism*. This trait captures a language's ability to treat related objects the same way. This tenent of an object-oriented language allows a base class to define a set of members (formally termed the *ploymorphic interface*) to all descendents. A class type's polymorphic interface is constructed using any number of *virtual* or *abstract* members. In a nutshell, a virtual member *may* be changed (or more formally speaking, *overridden*) by a derived class, whereas an abstract method *must* be overriden by a derived type. When derived types override the members defined by a base class, they are essentially redefining how they respond to the same request.

To illustrate polymorphism, let's revisit the shapes hierarchy. Assume that the `Shape` class has defined a method named `Draw()`, taking no parameters and returning nothing. Given the fact that every shape needs to render itself in a unique manner, subclasses (such as `Hexagon` and `Circle`) are free to override this method to their own liking (see Figure 4-4).

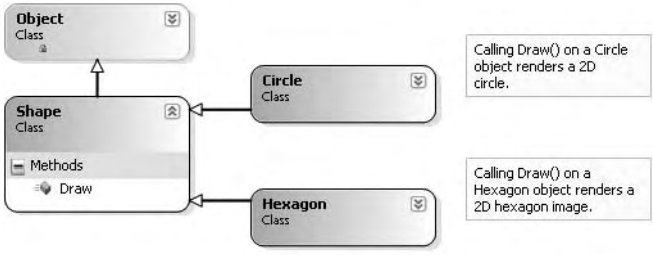


Figure 4-4. *Classical polymorphism*

Once a *polymorphic interface* has been designed, you can begin to make various assumptions in your code. For example, given that `Hexagon` and `Circle` derive from a common parent (`Shape`), an array of `Shape` types could contain any derived class. Furthermore, given that `Shape` defines a polymorphic interface to all derived types (the `Draw()` method in this example), we can assume each member in the array has this functionaltiy. Ponder the following `Main()` method, which instructs an array of `Shape`-derived types to render themselves using the `Draw()` method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Create an array of Shape derived items.
     Shape[] myShapes = new Shape[3];
     myShapes[0] = new Hexagon();
     myShapes[1] = new Circle();
     myShapes[2] = new Hexagon();

     // Iterate over the array and draw each item.
     foreach (Shape s in myShapes)
          s.Draw();
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

This wraps up our basic (and brisk) review of the pillars of OOP. Now that you have the theory in your minds, the bulk of this chapter explores further details and exact C# syntax that represents each trait.

The First Pillar: C#'s Encapsulation Services

The concept of encapsulation revolves around the notion that an object's field data should not be directly accessible from the public interface. Rather, if an object user wishes to alter the state of an object, it does so indirectly using accessor (get) and mutator (set) methods. In C#, encapsulation is enforced at the syntactic level using the `public`, `private`, `protected`, and `protected internal` keywords, as described in Chapter 3. To illustrate the need for encapsulation, assume you have created the following class definition:

```
// A class with a single public field.
public class Book
{
     public int numberOfPages;
}
```

The problem with public field data is that the items have no ability to "understand" whether the current value to which they are assigned is valid with regard to the current business rules of the system. As you know, the upper range of a C# `int` is quite large (2,147,483,647). Therefore, the compiler allows the following assignment:

```
// Humm...
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Book miniNovel = new Book();
     miniNovel.numberOfPages = 30000000;
}
```

Although you do not overflow the boundaries of an integer data type, it should be clear that a mini-novel with a page count of 30,000,000 pages is a bit unreasonable in the real world. As you can see, public fields do not provide a way to enforce data validation rules. If your system has a business rule that states a mini-novel must be between 1 and 200 pages, you are at a loss to enforce this programmatically. Because of this, public fields typically have no place in a production-level class definition (public read-only fields being the exception).

Encapsulation provides a way to preserve the integrity of state data. Rather than defining public fields (which can easily foster data corruption), you should get in the habit of defining *private data fields*, which are indirectly manipulated by the caller using one of two main techniques:

- Define a pair of traditional accessor and mutator methods.
- Define a named property.

Whichever technique you choose, the point is that a well-encapsulated class should hide its raw data and the details of how it operates from the prying eyes of the outside world. This is often termed *black box programming*. The beauty of this approach is that a class author is free to change how a given method is implemented under the hood, without breaking any existing code making use of it (provided that the signature of the method remains constant).

Enforcing Encapsulation Using Traditional Accessors and Mutators

Let's return to the existing `Employee` class. If you want the outside world to interact with your private `fullName` data field, tradition dictates defining an *accessor* (get method) and *mutator* (set method). For example:

```
// Traditional accessor and mutator for a point of private data.
public class Employee
{
     private string fullName;
...
     // Accessor.
     public string GetFullName() { return fullName; }

     // Mutator.
     public void SetFullName(string n)
     {
          // Remove any illegal characters (!, @, #, $, %),
          // check maximum length (or case rules) before making assignment.
```

```
            fullName = n;
        }
}
```

Understand, of course, that the compiler could not care less what you call your accessor and mutator methods. Given the fact that `GetFullName()` and `SetFullName()` encapsulate a private string named `fullName`, this choice of method names seems to fit the bill. The calling logic is as follows:

```
// Accessor/mutator usage.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Employee p = new Employee();
    p.SetFullName("Fred Flintstone");
    Console.WriteLine("Employee is named: {0}", p.GetFullName());
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Another Form of Encapsulation: Class Properties

In contrast to traditional accessor and mutator methods, .NET languages prefer to enforce encapsulation using *properties*, which simulate publicly accessible points of data. Rather than requiring the user to call two different methods to get and set the state data, the user is able to call what appears to be a public field. To illustrate, assume you have provided a property named `ID` that wraps the internal `empID` member variable of the `Employee` type. The calling syntax would look like this:

```
// Setting / getting a person's ID through property syntax.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Employee p = new Employee();

     // Set the value.
     p.ID = 81;

     // Get the value.
     Console.WriteLine("Person ID is: {0} ", p.ID);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Type properties always map to "real" accessor and mutator methods under the hood. Therefore, as a class designer you are able to perform any internal logic necessary before making the value assignment (e.g., uppercase the value, scrub the value for illegal characters, check the bounds of a numerical value, and so on). Here is the C# syntax behind the `ID` property, another property (`Pay`) that encapsulates the `currPay` field, and a final property (`Name`) to encapsulate the `fullName` data point.

```
// Encapsulation with properties.
public class Employee
{
...
     private int empID;
     private float currPay;
     private string fullName;

     // Property for empID.
     public int ID
     {
          get { return empID;}
          set
```

```
        {
            // You are still free to investigate (and possibly transform)
            // the incoming value before making an assignment.
            empID = value;
        }
    }

    // Property for fullName.
    public string Name
    {
        get {return fullName;}
        set {fullName = value;}
    }

    // Property for currPay.
    public float Pay
    {
        get {return currPay;}
        set {currPay = value;}
    }
}
```

A C# property is composed using a get block (accessor) and set block (mutator). The C# "value" token represents the right-hand side of the assignment. The underlying data type of the value token depends on which sort of data it represents. In this example, the `ID` property is operating on a `int` data type, which, as you recall, maps to a `System.Int32`:

```
// 81 is a System.Int32, so "value" is a System.Int32.
Employee e = new Employee();
e.ID = 81;
```

To prove the point, assume you have updated the `ID` property's set logic as follows:

```
// Property for the empID.
public int ID
{
    get { return empID;}
    set
    {
        Console.WriteLine("value is an instance of: {0} ", value.GetType());
        Console.WriteLine("value's value: {0} ", value);

        empID = value;
    }
}
```

Once you run this application, you would see the output shown in Figure 4-5.

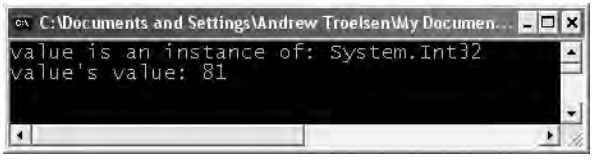


Figure 4-5. *The value of* `value` *when setting* `ID` *to 81*

■ **Note** Strictly speaking, the C# `value` token is not a keyword, but rather a *contentual keyword* that represents the implicit parameter used during a property assignment when within the scope of a property set. Given this, you are free to have member variables and local data points named "value".

Understand that properties (as opposed to traditional accessors and mutators) also make your types easier to manipulate, in that properties are able to respond to the intrinsic operators of C#. To illustrate, assume that the `Employee` class type has an internal private member variable representing the age of the employee. Here is our update:

```
public class Employee
{
...
     // Current age of employee.
     private int empAge;

     public Employee(string fullName, int age, int empID, float currPay)
     {
...
          this.empAge = age;
     }

     public int Age
     {
          get{return empAge;}
          set{empAge = value;}
     }

     public void DisplayStats()
     {
...
          Console.WriteLine("Age: {0} ", empAge);
     }
}
```

Now assume you have created an `Employee` object named `joe`. On his birthday, you wish to increment the age by one. Using traditional accessor and mutator methods, you would need to write code such as the following:

```
Employee joe = new Employee();
joe.SetAge(joe.GetAge() + 1);
```

However, if you encapsulate `empAge` using property snytax, you are able to simply write

```
Employee joe = new Employee();
joe.Age++;
```

Internal Representation of C# Properties

Many programmers (especially those of the C++ ilk) tend to design traditional accessor and mutator methods using "get_" and "set_" prefixes (e.g., `get_FullName()` and `set_FullName()`). This naming convention itself is not problematic. However, it is important to understand that under the hood, a C# property is represented in CIL code using these same prefixes. For example, if you open up the `Employees.exe` assembly using `ildasm.exe`, you see that each property actually resolves to hidden `get_XXX()`/`set_XXX()` methods (see Figure 4-6).

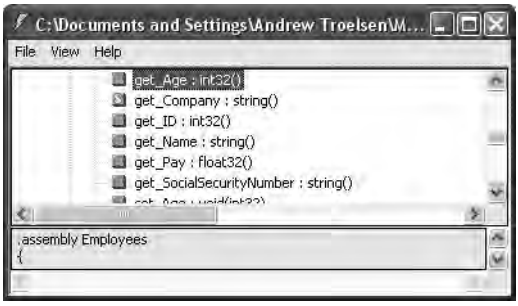


Figure 4-6. *Properties map to hidden* `get_XXX()` *and* `set_XXX()` *methods.*

Assume the `Employee` type now has a private member variable named `empSSN` to represent an individual's Social Security number, which is manipulated by a property named `SocialSecurityNumber` and set via constructor parameter.

```
// Add support for a new field representing the employee's SSN.
public class Employee
{
...
     // Social Security Number.
     private string empSSN;

     public Employee(string fullName, int age, int empID,
          float currPay, string ssn)
     {
...
          this.empSSN = ssn;
     }

     public string SocialSecurityNumber
     {
          get {  return empSSN; }
          set {  empSSN = value;}
     }

     public void DisplayStats()
     {
   ...
          Console.WriteLine("SSN: {0} ", empSSN);
     }
}
```

If you were to also define two methods named `get_SocialSecurityNumber()` and `set_SocialSecurityNumber()`, you would be issued compile-time errors:

```
// Remember, a C# property really maps to a get_/set_ pair.
public class Employee
{
...
     // ERROR! Already defined under the hood by the property!
     public string get_SocialSecurityNumber() {return empSSN;}
     public void set_SocialSecurityNumber (string val) {empSSN = val;}
}
```

■ **Note** The .NET base class libraries always favor type properties over traditional accessor and mutator methods. Therefore, if you wish to build custom types that integrate well with the .NET platform, avoid defining traditional get and set methods.

Controlling Visibility Levels of Property get/set Statements

Prior to C# 2005, the visibility of get and set logic was solely controlled by the access modifer of the property declaration:

```
// The get and set logic is both public,
// given the declaration of the property.
public string SocialSecurityNumber
{
     get {  return empSSN; }
     set {  empSSN = value;}
}
```

In some cases, it would be helpful to specify unique accessability levels for get and set logic. To do so, simply prefix an accessibility keyword to the appropriate `get` or `set` keyword (the unqualified scope takes the visibility of the property's declaration):

```
// Object users can only get the value, however
// derived types can set the value.
public string SocialSecurityNumber
{
     get {  return empSSN; }
     protected set {  empSSN = value;}
}
```

In this case, the set logic of `SocialSecurityNumber` can only be called by the current class and *derived* classes and therefore cannot be called from an object instance.

Read-Only and Write-Only Properties

When creating class types, you may wish to configure a read-only property. To do so, simply build a property without a corresponding set block. Likewise, if you wish to have a write-only property, omit the get block. We have no need to do so for this example; however, here is how the `SocialSecurityNumber` property could be retrofitted as read-only:

```
public class Employee
{
...
     // Now as a read-only property.
     public string SocialSecurityNumber {  get {  return empSSN; }  }
}
```

Given this adjustment, the only manner in which an employee's US Social Security number can be set is through a constructor argument.

Static Properties

C# also supports *static properties*. Recall from Chapter 3 that static members are accessed at the class level, not from an instance (object) of that class. For example, assume that the `Employee` type defines a point of static data to represent the name of the organization employing these workers. You may define a static (e.g., class-level) property as follows:

```
// Static properties must operate on static data!
public class Employee
{
     private static string companyName;
     public static string Company
     {
          get {  return companyName; }
          set {  companyName = value;}
     }
...
}
```

Static properties are manipulated in the same manner as static methods, as seen here:

```
// Set and get the name of the company that employs these people...
public static int Main(string[] args)
{
     Employee.Company = "Intertech Training";
     Console.WriteLine("These folks work at {0} ", Employee.Company);
...
}
```

Also, recall from Chapter 3 that C# provides static constructors. Therefore, if you wish to ensure that the static `companyName` property is always set to `Intertech Training`, you could add the following member to the `Employee` class:

```
// A static ctor takes no access modifer or arguments.
public class Employee
{
...
     static Employee()
     {
          companyName = "Intertech Training";
     }
}
```

In this case, we did not gain too much by adding a static constructor, given that the same end result could have been achieved by simply assigning the `companyName` member variable as follows:

```
// Static properties must operate on static data!
public class Employee
{
     private static string companyName = "Intertech Training";
...
}
```

However, recall that if you need to perform runtime logic to obtain the value to a point of static data (such as reading a database), static constructors are very helpful indeed.

To wrap up our examination of encapsulation, understand that properties are used for the same purpose as a classical accessor/mutator pair. The benefit of properties is that the users of your objects are able to manipulate the internal data point using a single named item.

The Second Pillar: C#'s Inheritance Support

Now that you have seen various techniques that allow you to create a single well-encapsulated class, it is time to turn your attention to building a family of related classes. As mentioned, inheritance is the aspect of OOP that facilitates code reuse. Inheritance comes in two flavors: classical

inheritance (the "is-a" relationship) and the containment/delegation model (the "has-a" relationship). Let's begin by examining the classical "is-a" model.

When you establish "is-a" relationships between classes, you are building a dependency between types. The basic idea behind classical inheritance is that new classes may leverage (and possibly extend) the functionality of other classes. To illustrate, assume that you wish to leverage the functionality of the `Employee` class to create two new classes (`SalesPerson` and `Manager`). The class hierarchy looks something like what you see in Figure 4-7.

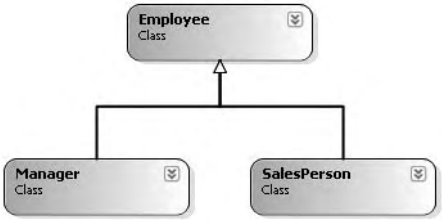


Figure 4-7. *The employee hierarchy*

As illustrated in Figure 4-7, you can see that a `SalesPerson` "is-a" `Employee` (as is a `Manager`). In the classical inheritance model, base classes (such as `Employee`) are used to define general characteristics that are common to all descendents. Subclasses (such as `SalesPerson` and `Manager`) extend this general functionality while adding more specific behaviors.

For our example, we will assume that the `Manager` class extends `Employee` by recording the number of stock options, while the `SalesPerson` class maintains the number of sales. In C#, extending a class is accomplished using the colon operator (`:`) on the class definition. This being said, here are the derived class types:

```
// Add two new subclasses to the Employees namespace.
namespace Employees
{
     public class Manager : Employee
     {
          // Managers need to know their number of stock options.
          private ulong numberOfOptions;
          public ulong NumbOpts
          {
               get { return numberOfOptions;}
               set { numberOfOptions = value; }
          }
     }

     public class SalesPerson : Employee
     {
          // Salespeople need to know their number of sales.
          private int numberOfSales;
          public int NumbSales
          {
               get { return numberOfSales;}
               set { numberOfSales = value; }
          }
     }
}
```

Now that you have established an "is-a" relationship, SalesPerson and Manager have automatically inherited all public (and protected) members of the Employee base class. To illustrate:

```
// Create a subclass and access base class functionality.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Make a salesperson.
     SalesPerson stan = new SalesPerson();

     // These members are inherited from the Employee base class.
     stan.ID = 100;
     stan.Name = "Stan";

     // This is defined by the SalesPerson class.
     stan.NumbSales = 42;
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Do be aware that inheritance preserves encapsulation. Therefore, a derived class cannot directly access the private members defined by its base class.

Controlling Base Class Creation with base

Currently, SalesPerson and Manager can only be created using a default constructor. With this in mind, assume you have added a new six-argument constructor to the Manager type, which is invoked as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Assume we now have the following constructor.
     // (name, age, ID, pay, SSN, number of stock options).
     Manager chucky = new Manager("Chucky", 35, 92, 100000, "333-23-2322", 9000);
}
```

If you look at the argument list, you can clearly see that most of these parameters should be stored in the member variables defined by the Employee base class. To do so, you could implement this new constructor as follows:

```
// If you do not say otherwise, a subclass constructor automatically calls the
// default constructor of its base class.
public Manager(string fullName, int age, int empID,
               float currPay, string ssn, ulong numbOfOpts)
{
     // This point of data belongs with us!
     numberOfOptions = numbOfOpts;

     // Leverage the various members inherited from Employee
     // to assign the state data.
     ID = empID;
     Age = age;
     Name = fullName;
     SocialSecurityNumber = ssn;
     Pay = currPay;
}
```

Although this is technically permissible, it is not optimal. In C#, unless you say otherwise, the *default constructor* of a base class is called automatically before the logic of the custom Manager constructor is executed. After this point, the current implementation accesses numerous public

properties of the Employee base class to establish its state. Thus, you have really made seven hits (five inherited properties and two constructor calls) during the creation of this derived object!

To help optimize the creation of a derived class, you will do well to implement your subclass constructors to *explicitly* call an appropriate custom base class constructor, rather than the default. In this way, you are able to reduce the number of calls to inherited initialization members (which saves time). Let's retrofit the custom constructor to do this very thing:

```
// This time, use the C# "base" keyword to call a custom
// constructor on the base class.
public Manager(string fullName, int age, int empID, float currPay,
               string ssn, ulong numbOfOpts)
     : base(fullName, age, empID, currPay, ssn)
{
     numberOfOptions = numbOfOpts;
}
```

Here, your constructor has been adorned with an odd bit of syntax. Directly after the closing parenthesis of the constructor's argument list, there is a single colon followed by the C# base keyword. In this situation, you are explicitly calling the five-argument constructor defined by Employee and saving yourself unnecessary calls during the creation of the child class.

The SalesPerson constructor looks almost identical:

```
// As a general rule, all subclasses should explicitly call an appropriate
// base class constructor.
public SalesPerson(string fullName, int age, int empID,
                   float currPay, string ssn, int numbOfSales)
     : base(fullName, age, empID, currPay, ssn)
{
     numberOfSales = numbOfSales;
}
```

Also be aware that you may use the base keyword anytime a subclass wishes to access a public or protected member defined by a parent class. Use of this keyword is not limited to constructor logic. You will see examples using the base keyword in this manner during our examination of polymorphism.

Regarding Multiple Base Classes

Speaking of base classes, it is important to keep in mind that C# demands that a given class have *exactly one* direct base class. Therefore, it is not possible to have a single type with two or more base classes (this technique is known as *multiple inheritance,* or simply MI). As you will see in Chapter 7, C# does allow a given type to implement any number of discrete interfaces. In this way, a C# class can exhibit a number of behaviors while avoiding the problems associated with classic MI. On a related note, it is permissible to configure a single *interface* to derive from multiple *interfaces* (again, see Chapter 7).

Keeping Family Secrets: The protected Keyword

As you already know, public items are directly accessible from anywhere, while private items cannot be accessed from any object beyond the class that has defined it. C# takes the lead of many other modern object languages and provides an additional level of accessibility: protected.

When a base class defines protected data or protected members, it is able to create a set of items that can be accessed directly by any descendent. If you wish to allow the SalesPerson and Manager child classes to directly access the data sector defined by Employee, you can update the original Employee class definition as follows:

```
// Protected state data.
public class Employee
{
     // Child classes can directly access this information. Object users cannot.
     protected string fullName;
     protected int empID;
     protected float currPay;
     protected string empSSN;
     protected int empAge;
...
}
```

The benefit of defining protected members in a base class is that derived types no longer have to access the data using public methods or properties. The possible downfall, of course, is that when a derived type has direct access to its parent's internal data, it is very possible to accidentally bypass existing business rules found within public properties (such as the mini-novel that exceeds the page count). When you define protected members, you are creating a level of trust between the parent and child class, as the compiler will not catch any violation of your type's business rules.

Finally, understand that as far as the object user is concerned, protected data is regarded as private (as the user is "outside" of the family). Therefore, the following is illegal:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Error! Can't access protected data from object instance.
     Employee emp = new Employee();
     emp.empSSN = "111-11-1111";
}
```

Preventing Inheritance: Sealed Classes

When you establish base class/subclass relationships, you are able to leverage the behavior of existing types. However, what if you wish to define a class that cannot be subclassed? For example, assume you have added yet another class to your employee namespaces that extends the existing `SalesPerson` type. Figure 4-8 shows the current update.

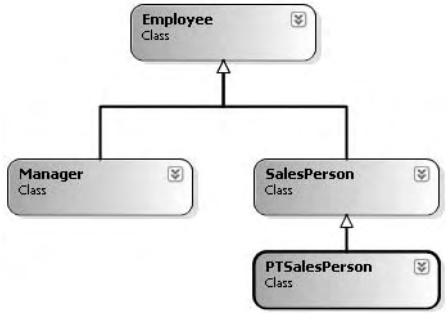


Figure 4-8. *The extended employee hierarchy*

`PTSalesPerson` is a class representing (of course) a part-time salesperson. For the sake of argument, let's say that you wish to ensure that no other developer is able to subclass from `PTSalesPerson`. (After all, how much more part-time can you get than "part-time"?) To prevent others from extending a class, make use of the C# `sealed` keyword:

```
// Ensure that PTSalesPerson cannot act as a base class to others.
public sealed class PTSalesPerson : SalesPerson
{
     public PTSalesPerson(string fullName, int age, int empID,
          float currPay, string ssn, int numbOfSales)
          : base(fullName, age, empID, currPay, ssn, numbOfSales)
     {
          // Interesting constructor logic...
     }
     // Other interesting members...
}
```

Because `PTSalesPerson` is sealed, it cannot serve as a base class to any other type. Thus, if you attempted to extend `PTSalesPerson`, you receive a compiler error:

```
// Compiler error!
public class ReallyPTSalesPerson : PTSalesPerson
{ ... }
```

The `sealed` keyword is most useful when creating stand-alone utility classes. As an example, the `String` class defined in the `System` namespace has been explicitly sealed:

```
public sealed class string : object,
    IComparable, ICloneable,
    IConvertible, IEnumerable {...}
```

Therefore, you cannot create some new class deriving from `System.String`:

```
// Another error!
public class MyString : string
{...}
```

If you wish to build a new class that leverages the functionality of a sealed class, your only option is to forego classical inheritance and make use of the containment/delegation model (aka the "has-a" relationship).

Programming for Containment/Delegation

As noted a bit earlier in this chapter, inheritance comes in two flavors. We have just explored the classical "is-a" relationship. To conclude the exploration of the second pillar of OOP, let's examine the "has-a" relationship (also known as the *containment/delegation* model). Assume you have created a new class that models an employee benefits package:

```
// This type will function as a contained class.
public class BenefitPackage
{
     // Assume we have other members that represent
     // 401K plans,  dental / health benefits and so on.
     public double ComputePayDeduction()
     { return 125.0; }
}
```

Obviously, it would be rather odd to establish an "is-a" relationship between the `BenefitPackage` class and the employee types. (`Manager` "is-a" `BenefitPackage`? I don't think so) However, it should be clear that some sort of relationship between the two could be established. In short, you would like to express the idea that each employee "has-a" `BenefitPackage`. To do so, you can update the `Employee` class definition as follows:

```
// Employees now have benefits.
public class Employee
{
...
     // Contain a BenefitPackage object.
     protected BenefitPackage empBenefits = new BenefitPackage();
}
```

At this point, you have successfully contained another object. However, to expose the functionality of the contained object to the outside world requires *delegation*. Delegation is simply the act of adding members to the containing class that make use of the contained object's functionality. For example, we could update the `Employee` class to expose the contained `empBenefits` object using a custom property as well as make use of its functionality internally using a new method named `GetBenefitCost()`:

```
public class Employee
{
     protected BenefitPackage empBenefits = new BenefitPackage();

     // Expose certain benefit behaviors of object.
     public double GetBenefitCost()
     {
          return empBenefits.ComputePayDeduction();
     }

     // Expose object through a custom property.
     public BenefitPackage Benefits
     {
        get { return empBenefits; }
        set { empBenefits = value; }
     }
}
```

In the following updated `Main()` method, notice how we can interact with the internal `BenefitsPackage` type defined by the `Employee` type:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Manager mel;
     mel = new Manager();
     Console.WriteLine(mel.Benefits.ComputePayDeduction());
...
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Nested Type Definitions

Before examining the final pillar of OOP (polymorphism), let's explore a programming technique termed *nested types*. In C#, it is possible to define a type (enum, class, interface, struct, or delegate) directly within the scope of a class or structure. When you have done so, the nested (or "inner") type is considered a *member* of the nesting (or "outer") class, and in the eyes of the runtime can be manipulated like any other member (fields, properties, methods, events, etc.). The syntax used to nest a type is quite straightforward:

```
public class OuterClass
{
     // A public nested type can be used by anybody.
     public class PublicInnerClass {}
```

```
    // A private nested type can only be used by members
    // of the containing class.
    private class PrivateInnerClass {}
}
```

Although the syntax is clean, understanding *why* you might do this is not readily apparent. To understand this technique, ponder the following:

- Nesting types is similar to composition ("has-a"), except that you have complete control over the access level of the inner *type* instead of a contained *object*.
- Because a nested type is a member of the containing class, it can access private members of the containing class.
- Oftentimes, a nested type is only useful as helper for the outer class, and is not intended for use by the outside world.

When a type nests another class type, it can create member variables of the type, just as it would for any point of data. However, if you wish to make use of a nested type from outside of the containing type, you must qualify it by the scope of the nesting type. Ponder the following code:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
   // Create and use the public inner class. OK!
   OuterClass.PublicInnerClass inner;
   inner = new OuterClass.PublicInnerClass();

   // Compiler Error! Cannot access the private class.
   OuterClass.PrivateInnerClass inner2;
   inner2 = new OuterClass.PrivateInnerClass();
}
```

To make use of this concept within our employees example, assume we have now nested the `BenefitPackage` directly within the `Employee` class type:

```
// Nesting the BenefitPackage.
public class Employee
{
...
    public class BenefitPackage
    {
        public double ComputePayDeduction()
        { return 125.0; }
    }
}
```

The nesting process can be as "deep" as you require. For example, assume we wish to create an enumeration named `BenefitPackageLevel`, which documents the various benefit levels an employee may choose. To programmatically enforce the connection between `Employee`, `BenefitPackage`, and `BenefitPackageLevel`, we could nest the enumeration as follows:

```
// Employee nests BenefitPackage.
public class Employee
{
    // BenefitPackage nests BenefitPackageLevel.
    public class BenefitPackage
    {
        public double ComputePayDeduction()
        { return 125.0; }
```

```
        public enum BenefitPackageLevel
        {
            Standard, Gold, Platinum
        }
    }
}
```

Because of the nesting relationships, note how we are required to make use of this enumeration:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Creating a BenefitPackageLevel variable.
    Employee.BenefitPackage.BenefitPackageLevel myBenefitLevel =
        Employee.BenefitPackage.BenefitPackageLevel.Platinum;
...
}
```

The Third Pillar: C#'s Polymorphic Support

Let's now examine the final pillar of OOP: polymorphism. Recall that the `Employee` base class defined a method named `GiveBonus()`, which was implemented as follows:

```
// Give bonus to employees.
public class Employee
{
...
    public void GiveBonus(float amount)
    { currPay += amount; }
}
```

Because this method has been defined as public, you can now give bonuses to salespeople and managers (as well as part-time salespeople):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Give each employee a bonus.
    Manager chucky = new Manager("Chucky", 50, 92, 100000, "333-23-2322", 9000);
    chucky.GiveBonus(300);
    chucky.DisplayStats();

    SalesPerson fran = new SalesPerson("Fran", 43, 93, 3000, "932-32-3232", 31);
    fran.GiveBonus(200);
    fran.DisplayStats();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

The problem with the current design is that the inherited `GiveBonus()` method operates identically for all subclasses. Ideally, the bonus of a salesperson or part-time salesperson should take into account the number of sales. Perhaps managers should gain additional stock options in conjunction with a monetary bump in salary. Given this, you are suddenly faced with an interesting question: "How can related objects respond differently to the same request?"

The virtual and override Keywords

Polymorphism provides a way for a subclass to customize how it implements a method defined by its base class. To retrofit your current design, you need to understand the meaning of the C# `virtual` and `override` keywords. If a base class wishes to define a method that *may be* overridden by a subclass, it must specify the method as virtual:

```
public class Employee
{
     // GiveBonus() has a default implementation, however
     // child classes are free to override this behavior.
     public virtual void GiveBonus(float amount)
     { currPay += amount; }
...
}
```

When a subclass wishes to redefine a virtual method, it does so using the `override` keyword. For example, the `SalesPerson` and `Manager` could override `GiveBonus()` as follows (assume that `PTSalesPerson` overrides `GiveBonus()` in manner similar to `SalesPerson`):

```
public class SalesPerson : Employee
{
     // A salesperson's bonus is influenced by the number of sales.
     public override void GiveBonus(float amount)
     {
          int salesBonus = 0;
          if(numberOfSales >= 0 && numberOfSales <= 100)
               salesBonus = 10;
          else if(numberOfSales >= 101 && numberOfSales <= 200)
               salesBonus = 15;
          else
               salesBonus = 20;     // Anything greater than 200.
          base.GiveBonus (amount * salesBonus);
     }
...
}

public class Manager : Employee
{
     // Managers get some number of new stock options, in addition to raw cash.
     public override void GiveBonus(float amount)
     {
          // Increase salary.
          base.GiveBonus(amount);

          // And give some new stock options...
          Random r = new Random();
          numberOfOptions += (ulong)r.Next(500);
     }
...
}
```

Notice how each overridden method is free to leverage the default behavior using the `base` keyword. In this way, you have no need to completely reimplement the logic behind `GiveBonus()`, but can reuse (and possibly extend) the default behavior of the parent class.

Also assume that `Employee.DisplayStats()` has been declared virtual, and has been overridden by each subclass to account for displaying the number of sales (for salespeople) and current stock options (for managers). Now that each subclass can interpret what these virtual methods means to itself, each object instance behaves as a more independent entity:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // A better bonus system!
     Manager chucky = new Manager("Chucky", 50, 92, 100000, "333-23-2322", 9000);
```

```
    chucky.GiveBonus(300);
    chucky.DisplayStats();

    SalesPerson fran = new SalesPerson("Fran", 43, 93, 3000, "932-32-3232", 31);
    fran.GiveBonus(200);
    fran.DisplayStats();
}
```

Revisiting the sealed Keyword

The `sealed` keyword can also be applied to type members to prevent virtual members from being further overridden by derived types. This can be helpful when you do not wish to seal an entire class, just a few select methods or properties.

For the sake of illustration, if we (for some reason) did wish to allow the `PTSalesPerson` class to be extended by other classes but make sure those classes did *not* further override the virtual `GiveBonus()`, we could write the following:

```
// This class can be extended;
// however, GiveBonus() cannot be overriden by derived classes.
public class PTSalesPerson : SalesPerson
{
...
    public override sealed void GiveBonus(float amount)
    {
...
    }
}
```

Understanding Abstract Classes

Currently, the `Employee` base class has been designed to supply protected member variables for its descendents, as well as supply two virtual methods (`GiveBonus()` and `DisplayStats()`) that may be overridden by a given descendent. While this is all well and good, there is a rather odd byproduct of the current design: You can directly create instances of the `Employee` base class:

```
// What exactly does this mean?
Employee X = new Employee();
```

In this example, the only real purpose of the `Employee` base class is to define common fields and members for all subclasses. In all likelihood, you did not intend anyone to create a direct instance of this class, reason being that the `Employee` type itself is too general of a concept. For example, if I were to walk up to you and say, "I'm an employee!," I would bet your very first question to me would be,"What *kind* of employee are you?" (a consultant, trainer, admin assistant, copy editor, White House aide, etc.).

Given that many base classes tend to be rather nebulous entities, a far better design for our example is to *prevent* the ability to directly create a new `Employee` object in code. In C#, you can enforce this programmatically by using the `abstract` keyword:

```
// Update the Employee class as abstract to prevent direct instantiation.
abstract public class Employee
{ ...}
```

With this, if you now attempt to create an instance of the `Employee` class, you are issued a compile-time error:

```
// Error! Can't create an instance of an abstract class.
Employee X = new Employee();
```

Excellent! At this point you have constructed a fairly interesting employee hierarchy. We will add a bit more functionaltiy to this application later in this chapter when examining C# casting rules. Until then, Figure 4-9 illustrates the core design of our current types.

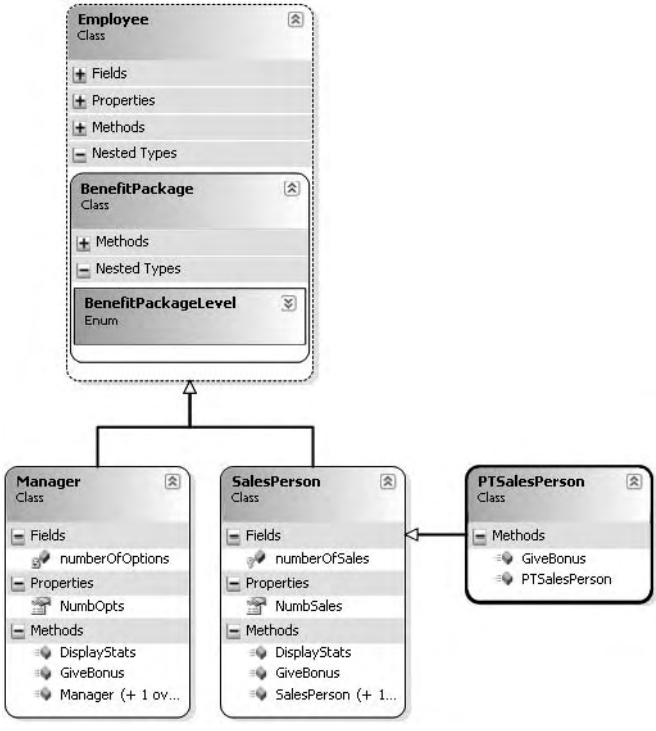


Figure 4-9. *The completed employee hierarchy*

■ **Source Code** The Employees project is included under the Chapter 4 subdirectory.

Enforcing Polymorphic Activity: Abstract Methods

When a class has been defined as an abstract base class, it may define any number of *abstract members* (which is analogous to a C++ pure virtual function). Abstract methods can be used whenever you wish to define a method that *does not* supply a default implementation. By doing so, you enforce a polymorphic trait on each descendent, leaving them to contend with the task of providing the details behind your abstract methods.

The first logical question you might have is, "Why would I ever want to do this?" To understand the role of abstract methods, let's revisit the shapes hierarchy seen earlier in this chapter, extended as shown in Figure 4-10.

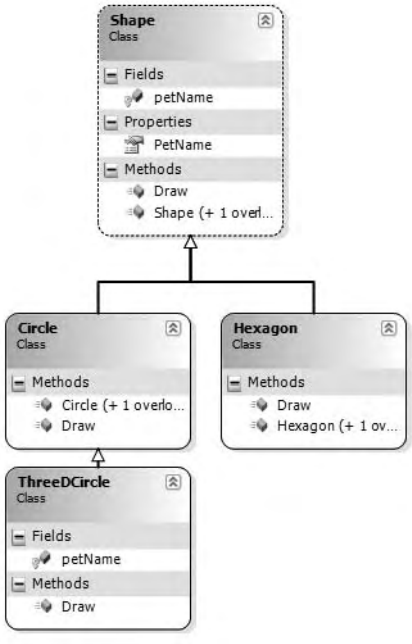


Figure 4-10. *The shapes hierarchy*

Much like the employee hierarchy, you should be able to tell that you don't want to allow the object user to create an instance of `Shape` directly, as it is too abstract of a concept. Again, to prevent the direct creation of the `Shape` type, you could define it as an abstract class:

```
namespace Shapes
{
     public abstract class Shape
     {
          // Shapes can be assigned a friendly pet name.
          protected string petName;

          // Constructors.
          public Shape(){ petName = "NoName"; }
          public Shape(string s) {  petName = s;}

          // Draw() is virtual and may be overridden.
          public virtual void Draw()
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Shape.Draw()");
          }

          public string PetName
          {
               get { return petName;}
               set {  petName = value;}
          }
     }
```

```
    // Circle DOES NOT override Draw().
    public class Circle : Shape
    {
        public Circle() { }
        public Circle(string name): base(name) { }
    }

    // Hexagon DOES override Draw().
    public class Hexagon : Shape
    {
        public Hexagon(){ }
        public Hexagon(string name): base(name) { }
        public override void Draw()
        {
            Console.WriteLine("Drawing {0} the Hexagon", petName);
        }
    }
}
```

Notice that the `Shape` class has defined a virtual method named `Draw()`. As you have just seen, subclasses are free to redefine the behavior of a virtual method using the `override` keyword (as in the case of the `Hexagon` class). The point of abstract methods becomes crystal clear when you understand that subclasses are not required to override virtual methods (as in the case of `Circle`). Therefore, if you create an instance of the `Hexagon` and `Circle` types, you'd find that the `Hexagon` understands how to draw itself correctly. The `Circle`, however, is more than a bit confused (see Figure 4-11 for output):

```
// The Circle object did not override the base class implementation of Draw().
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Hexagon hex = new Hexagon("Beth");
    hex.Draw();
    Circle cir = new Circle("Cindy");

    // Humm. Using base class implementation.
    cir.Draw();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```



Figure 4-11. *Virtual methods do not have to be overridden.*

Clearly this is not a very intelligent design for the shapes heirarchy. To enforce that each child class defines what `Draw()` means to itself, you can simply establish `Draw()` as an abstract method of the `Shape` class, which by definition means you provide no default implementation whatsoever. Note that abstract methods can only be defined in abstract classes. If you attempt to do otherwise, you will be issued a compiler error:

```
// Force all kids to figure out how to be rendered.
public abstract class Shape
{
     ...
     // Draw() is now completely abstract (note semicolon).
     public abstract void Draw();
...
}
```

Given this, you are now obligated to implement `Draw()` in your `Circle` class. If you do not, `Circle` is also assumed to be a noncreatable abstract type that must be adorned with the `abstract` keyword (which is obviously not very useful in this example):

```
// If we did not implement the abstract Draw() method, Circle would also be
// considered abstract, and could not be directly created!
public class Circle : Shape
{
     public Circle(){ }
     public Circle(string name): base(name) { }

     // Now Circle must decide how to render itself.
     public override void Draw()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing {0} the Circle", petName);
     }
}
```

To illustrate the full story of polymorphism, consider the following code:

```
// Create an array of various Shapes.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Polymorphism *****\n");
     Shape[] myShapes = {new Hexagon(), new Circle(), new Hexagon("Mick"),
                         new Circle("Beth"), new Hexagon("Linda")};

     // Loop over the array and ask each object to draw itself.
     for(int i = 0; i < myShapes.Length; i++)
          myShapes[i].Draw();
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Figure 4-12 shows the output.

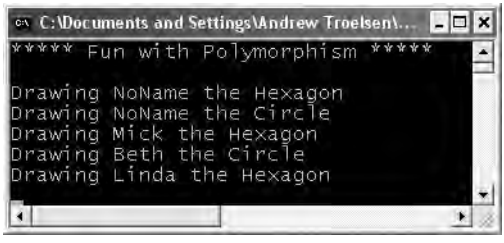

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\...
***** Fun with Polymorphism *****
Drawing NoName the Hexagon
Drawing NoName the Circle
Drawing Mick the Hexagon
Drawing Beth the Circle
Drawing Linda the Hexagon

Figure 4-12. *Fun with polymorphism*

This `Main()` method illustrates polymorphism at its finest. Recall that when you mark a class as abstract, you are unable to create a *direct instance* of that type. However, you can freely store references to any subclass within an abstract base variable. As you iterate over the array of `Shape` references, it is at runtime that the correct type is determined. At this point, the correct method is invoked.

Member Hiding

C# provides a facility that is the logical opposite of method overriding: member hiding. Formally speaking, if a derived class redeclares an identical member inherited from a base class, the derived class has hidden (or *shadowed*) the parent's member. In the real world, this possibility is the greatest when you are subclassing from a class you (or your team) did not create yourselves (for example, if you purchase a third-party .NET software package).

For the sake of illustration, assume you receive a class named `ThreeDCircle` from a coworker (or classmate) that currently derives from `System.Object`:

```
public class ThreeDCircle
{
     public void Draw()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing a 3D Circle");
     }
}
```

You figure that a `ThreeDCircle` "is-a" `Circle`, so you derive from your existing `Circle` type:

```
public class ThreeDCircle : Circle
{
     public void Draw()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing a 3D Circle");
     }
}
```

Once you recompile, you find the following warning shown in Visual Studio 2005 (see Figure 4-13).

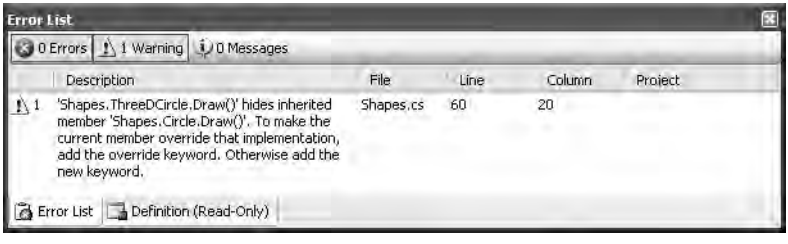


Figure 4-13. *Oops!* `ThreeDCircle.Draw()` *shadows* `Circle.Draw`.

To address this issue, you have two options. You could simply update the parent's version of `Draw()` using the `override` keyword. With this approach, the `ThreeDCircle` type is able to extend the parent's default behavior as required.

As an alternative, you can prefix the `new` keyword to the offending `Draw()` member of the `ThreeDCircle` type. Doing so explicitly states that the derived type's implemention is intentionally designed to hide the parent's version (again, in the real world, this can be helpful if external .NET software somehow conflicts with your current software).

```
// This class extends Circle and hides the inherited Draw() method.
public class ThreeDCircle : Circle
{
     // Hide any Draw() implementation above me.
     public new void Draw()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing a 3D Circle");
     }
}
```

You can also apply the `new` keyword to any member type inherited from a base class (field, constant, static member, property, etc.). As a further example, assume that `ThreeDCircle` wishes to hide the inherited `petName` field:

```
public class ThreeDCircle : Circle
{
     new protected string petName;
     new public void Draw()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing a 3D Circle");
     }
}
```

Finally, be aware that it is still possible to trigger the base class implementation of a shadowed member using an *explicit cast* (described in the next section). For example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     ThreeDCircle o = new ThreeDCircle();
     o.Draw();              // Calls ThreeDCircle.Draw()
     ((Circle)o).Draw();    // Calls Circle.Draw()
}
```

■ **Source Code** The `Shapes` hierarchy can be found under the Chapter 4 subdirectory.

C# Casting Rules

Next up, you need to learn the laws of C# *casting operations*. Recall the `Employees` hierarchy and the fact that the topmost class in the system is `System.Object`. Therefore, everything "is-a" object and can be treated as such. Given this fact, it is legal to store an instance of any type within a object variable:

```
// A Manager "is-a" System.Object.
object frank = new Manager("Frank Zappa", 9, 40000, "111-11-1111", 5);
```

In the `Employees` system, `Managers`, `SalesPerson`, and `PTSalesPerson` types all extend `Employee`, so we can store any of these objects in a valid base class reference. Therefore, the following statements are also legal:

```
// A Manager "is-a" Employee too.
Employee moonUnit = new Manager("MoonUnit Zappa", 2, 20000, "101-11-1321", 1);

// A PTSalesPerson "is-a" SalesPerson.
SalesPerson jill = new PTSalesPerson("Jill", 834, 100000, "111-12-1119", 90);
```

The first law of casting between class types is that when two classes are related by an "is-a" relationship, it is always safe to store a derived type within a base class reference. Formally, this is called an *implicit cast*, as "it just works" given the laws of inheritance. This leads to some powerful programming constructs. For example, if you have a class named `TheMachine` that supports the following static method:

```
public class TheMachine
{
     public static void FireThisPerson(Employee e)
     {
          // Remove from database...
          // Get key and pencil sharpener from fired employee...
     }
}
```

you can effectively pass any descendent from the `Employee` class into this method directly, given the "is-a" relationship:

```
// Streamline the staff.
TheMachine.FireThisPerson(moonUnit);   // "moonUnit" was declared as an Employee.
TheMachine.FireThisPerson(jill);       // "jill" was declared as a SalesPerson.
```

The following code compiles given the implicit cast from the base class type (`Employee`) to the derived type. However, what if you also wanted to fire Frank Zappa (currently stored in a generic `System.Object` reference)? If you pass the `frank` object directly into `TheMachine.FireThisPerson()` as follows:

```
// A Manager "is-a" object, but...
object frank = new Manager("Frank Zappa", 9, 40000, "111-11-1111", 5);
...
TheMachine.FireThisPerson(frank);     // Error!
```

you are issued a compiler error. The reason is you cannot automatically treat a `System.Object` as a derived `Employee` directly, given that `Object` "is-not-a" `Employee`. As you can see, however, the object reference is pointing to an `Employee`-compatible object. You can satisfy the compiler by performing an *explicit cast*.

In C#, explicit casts are denoted by placing parentheses around the type you wish to cast to, followed by the object you are attempting to cast from. For example:

```
// Cast from the generic System.Object into a strongly
// typed Manager.
Manager mgr = (Manager)frank;
Console.WriteLine("Frank's options: {0}", mgr.NumbOpts);
```

If you would rather not declare a specific variable of "type to cast to," you are able to condense the previous code as follows:

```
// An "inline" explicit cast.
Console.WriteLine("Frank's options: {0}",  ((Manager)frank).NumbOpts);
```

As far as passing the `System.Object` reference into the `FireThisPerson()` method, the problem can be rectified as follows:

```
// Explicitly cast System.Object into an Employee.
TheMachine.FireThisPerson((Employee)frank);
```

■ **Note** If you attempt to cast an object into an incompatable type, you receive an invalid cast exception at runtime. Chapter 6 examines the details of structured exception handling.

Determining the "Type of" Employee

Given that the static `TheMachine.FireThisPerson()` method has been designed to take any possible type derived from `Employee`, one question on your mind may be how this method can determine which derived type was sent into the method. On a related note, given that the incoming parameter is of type `Employee`, how can you gain access to the specialized members of the `SalesPerson` and `Manager` types?

The C# language provides three ways to determine whether a given base class reference is actually referring to a derived type: explicit casting (previously examined), the `is` keyword, and the `as` keyword. The `is` keyword is helpful in that it will return a Boolean that signals whether the base class reference is compatible with a given derived type. Ponder the following updated `FireThisPerson()` method:

```
public class TheMachine
{
     public static void FireThisPerson(Employee e)
     {
          if(e is SalesPerson)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Lost a sales person named {0}", e.GetFullName());
               Console.WriteLine("{0} made {1} sale(s)...",
                    e.GetFullName(), ((SalesPerson)e).NumbSales);
          }
          if(e is Manager)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Lost a suit named {0}", e.GetFullName());
               Console.WriteLine("{0} had {1} stock options...",
                    e.GetFullName(), ((Manager)e).NumbOpts);
          }
     }
}
```

Here, you make use of the `is` keyword to dynamically determine the type of employee. To gain access to the `NumbSales` and `NumbOpts` properties, you make use of an explicit cast. As an alternative, you could make use of the `as` keyword to obtain a reference to the more derived type (if the types are incompatible, the reference is set to null):

```
SalesPerson p = e as SalesPerson;
if(p != null)
     Console.WriteLine("# of sales: {0}", p.NumbSales);
```

■ **Note** As you will see in Chapter 7, these same techniques (explicit cast, `is`, and `as`) can be used to obtain an interface reference from an implementing type.

Numerical Casts

To wrap up our examination of C# casting operations, be aware that numerical conversions follow more or less the same rules. If you are attempting to place a "larger" numerical type to a "smaller" type (such as an integer into a byte), you must also make an explicit cast that informs the compiler you are willing to accept any possible data loss:

```
// If "x" were larger than a byte's upper limit, data loss is almost certain;
// however, in Chapter 9 you will learn about "checked exceptions," which
// can alter the outcome.
int x = 6;
byte b = (byte)x;
```

However, when you are storing a "smaller" numerical type into a "larger" type (such as a byte to an integer), the type is implicitly cast on your behalf, as there is no loss of data:

```
// No need to cast, as an int is big enough to store a byte.
byte b = 30;
int x = b;
```

Understanding C# Partial Types

C# 2005 introduces a new type modifer named `partial` that allows you to define a C# type across multiple `*.cs` files. Earlier versions of the C# programming language required all code for a given type be defined within a single `*.cs` file. Given the fact that a production-level C# class may be hundreds of lines of code (or more), this can end up being a mighty long file indeed.

In these cases, it would be ideal to partition a type's implementation across numerous C# files in order to separate code that is in some way more important for other details. For example, using the `partial` class modifer, you could place all public members in a file named `MyType_Public.cs`, while the private field data and private helper functions are defined within `MyType_Private.cs`:

```
// MyClass_Public.cs
namespace PartialTypes
{
     public partial class MyClass
    {
         // Constructors.
         public MyClass() { }

         // All public members.
         public void MemberA() { }
         public void MemberB() { }
    }
}

// MyClass_Private.cs
namespace PartialTypes
{
    public partial class MyClass
    {
        // Private field data.
        private string someStringData;

        // All private helper members.
        public static void SomeStaticHelper() { }
    }
}
```

As you might guess, this can be helpful to new team members who need to quickly learn about the public interface of the type. Rather than reading though a single (lengthy) C# file to find the members of interest, they can focus on the public members. Of course, once these files are compiled by `csc.exe`, the end result is a single unified type (see Figure 4-14).

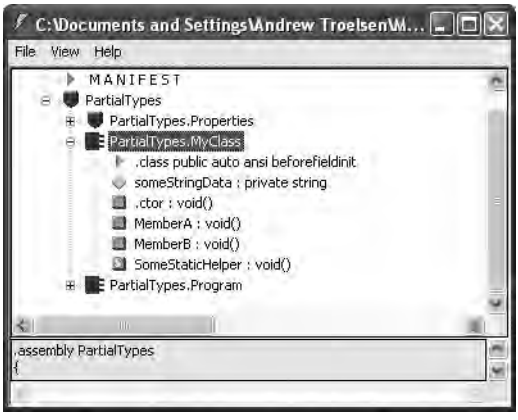


Figure 4-14. *Once compiled, partial types are no longer partial.*

■ **Note** As you will see during our examination of Windows Forms and ASP .NET, Visual Studio 2005 makes use of the partial keyword to partition code generated by the IDE's designer tools. Using this approach, you can keep focused on your current solution, and be blissfully unaware of the designer-generated code.

■ **Source Code** The PartialTypes project can be found under the Chapter 4 subdirectory.

Documenting C# Source Code via XML

To wrap this chapter up, the final task is to examine specific C# comment tokens that yield XML-based code documentation. If you have a background in Java, you are most likely familiar with the javadoc utility. Using javadoc, you are able to turn Java source code into a corresponding HTML representation. The C# documentation model is slightly different, in that the "code comments to XML" conversion process is the job of the C# compiler (via the `/doc` option) rather than a stand-alone utility.

So, why use XML to document our type definitions rather than HTML? The main reason is that XML is a very "enabling technology." Given that XML separates the definition of data from the presentation of that data, we can apply any number of XML transformations to the underlying XML to display the code documentation in a variety of formats (MSDN format, HTML, etc).

When you wish to document your C# types in XML, your first step is to make use of one of two notations, the triple forward slash (`///`) or a delimited comment that begins with a single forward slash and two stars (`/**`) and ends with a single star-slash combo (`*/`). Once a documentation comment has been declared, you are free to use any well-formed XML elements, including the recommended set shown in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1. *Recommended Code Comment XML Elements*

Predefined XML Documentation Element	Meaning in Life
<c>	Indicates that the following text should be displayed in a specific "code font"
<code>	Indicates multiple lines should be marked as code
<example>	Mocks up a code example for the item you are describing
<exception>	Documents which exceptions a given class may throw
<list>	Inserts a list or table into the documentation file
<param>	Describes a given parameter
<paramref>	Associates a given XML tag with a specific parameter
<permission>	Documents the security constraints for a given member
<remarks>	Builds a description for a given member
<returns>	Documents the return value of the member
<see>	Cross-references related items in the document
<seealso>	Builds an "also see" section within a description
<summary>	Documents the "executive summary" for a given member
<value>	Documents a given property

As a concrete example, here is a definition of a type named `Car` (note the use of the `<summary>` and `<param>` elements):

```
/// <summary>
///  This is a simple Car that illustrates
///  working with XML style documentation.
/// </summary>
public class Car
{
    /// <summary>
    /// Do you have a sunroof?
    /// </summary>
    private bool hasSunroof = false;

    /// <summary>
    /// The ctor lets you set the sunroofedness.
    /// </summary>
    /// <param name="hasSunroof"> </param>
    public Car(bool hasSunroof)
    {
        this.hasSunroof = hasSunroof;
    }

    /// <summary>
    /// This method allows you to open your sunroof.
    /// </summary>
    /// <param name="state"> </param>
    public void OpenSunroof(bool state)
    {
        if(state == true && hasSunroof == true)
            Console.WriteLine("Put sunscreen on that bald head!");
        else
```

```
            Console.WriteLine("Sorry...you don't have a sunroof.");
    }
}
```

The program's `Main()` method is also documented using select XML elements:

```
/// <summary>
/// Entry point to application.
/// </summary>
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Car c = new Car(true);
    c.OpenSunroof(true);
}
```

If you are building your C# programs using `csc.exe`, the `/doc` flag is used to generate a specified `*.xml` file based on your XML code comments:

```
csc /doc:XmlCarDoc.xml *.cs
```

Visual Studio 2005 allows you to specify the name of an XML documentation file using the Build tab of the Properties window (see Figure 4-15).

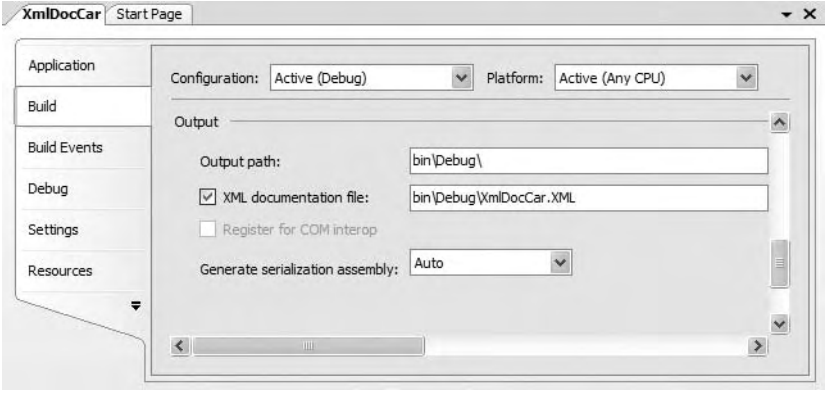


Figure 4-15. *Generating an XML documentation file using Visual Studio 2005*

XML Code Comment Format Characters

If you were now to open the generated XML file, you will notice that the elements are qualified by numerous characters such as "M", "T", "F", and so on. For example:

```
<member name="T:XmlDocCar.Car">
     <summary>
          This is a simple Car that illustrates
          working with XML style documentation.
     </summary>
</member>
```

Table 4-2 describes the meaning behind these tokens.

Table 4-2. *XML Format Characters*

Format Character	Meaning in Life
E	Item denotes an event.
F	Item represents a field.
M	Item represents a method (including constructors and overloaded operators).
N	Item denotes a namespace.
P	Item represents type properties (including indexes).
T	Item represents a type (e.g., class, interface, struct, enum, delegate).

Transforming XML Code Comments

Previous versions of Visual Studio 2005 (Visual Studio .NET 2003 in particular) included a very helpful tool that would transform XML code documentation files into an HTML-based help system. Sadly, Visual Studio 2005 does not ship with this utility, leaving us with a raw XML document. If you are comfortable with the ins and outs of XML transformations, you are, of course, free to manually create your own style sheets.

A simpler alternative, however, are the numerous third-party tools that will translate an XML code file into various helpful formats. For example, recall from Chapter 2 that the NDoc application generates documentation in several different formats. Again, information regarding NDoc can be found at `http://ndoc.sourceforge.net`.

■ **Source Code** The XmlDocCar project can be found under the Chapter 4 subdirectory.

Summary

If you already come to the universe of .NET from another object-oriented language, this chapter may have been more of a quick compare and contrast between your current language of choice and C#. On the other hand, if you are exploring OOP for the first time, you may have found many of the concepts presented here a bit confounding. Fear not; as you work through the remainder of this book, you will have have numerous opportunities to solidify the concepts presented here.

This chapter began with a review of the pillars of OOP: encapsulation, inheritance, and polymorphism. Encapsulation services can be accounted for using traditional accessor/mutator methods, type properties, or read-only public fields. Inheritance under C# could not be any simpler, given that the language does not provide a specific keyword, but rather makes use of the simple colon operator. Last but not least, you have polymorphism, which is supported via the `abstract`, `virtual`, `override`, and `new` keywords.

CHAPTER 5

Understanding Object Lifetime

In the previous chapter, you learned a great deal about how to build custom class types using C#. Here, you will come to understand how the CLR is managing allocated objects via *garbage collection*. C# programmers never directly deallocate a managed object from memory (recall there is no "delete" keyword in the C# language). Rather, .NET objects are allocated onto a region of memory termed the *managed heap*, where they will be automatically destroyed by the garbage collector at "some time in the future."

Once you have examined the core details of the collection process, you will learn how to programmatically interact with the garbage collector using the `System.GC` class type. Next you examine how the virtual `System.Object.Finalize()` method and `IDisposable` interface can be used to build types that release internal *unmanaged resources* in a timely manner. By the time you have completed this chapter, you will have a solid understanding of how .NET objects are managed by the CLR.

Classes, Objects, and References

To frame the topics examined in this chapter, it is important to further clarify the distinction between classes, objects, and references. Recall from the previous chapter that a class is nothing more than a blueprint that describes how an instance of this type will look and feel in memory. Classes, of course, are defined within a code file (which in C# takes a `*.cs` extension by convention). Consider a simple `Car` class defined within `Car.cs`:

```
// Car.cs
public class Car
{
    private int currSp;
    private string petName;

    public Car(){}
    public Car(string name, int speed)
    {
          petName = name;
          currSp = speed;
     }
     public override string ToString()
     {
          return string.Format("{0} is going {1} MPH",
               petName, currSp);
     }
}
```

Once a class is defined, you can allocate any number of objects using the C# `new` keyword. Understand, however, that the `new` keyword returns a *reference* to the object on the heap, not the actual object itself. This reference variable is stored on the stack for further use in your application. When you wish to invoke members on the object, apply the C# dot operator to the stored reference:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        // Create a new Car object on
        // the managed heap. We are
        // returned a reference to this
        // object ('refToMyCar').
        Car refToMyCar = new Car("Zippy", 50);

        // The C# dot operator (.) is used
        // to invoke members on the object
        // using our reference variable.
        Console.WriteLine(refToMyCar.ToString());
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Figure 5-1 illustrates the class, object, and reference relationship.

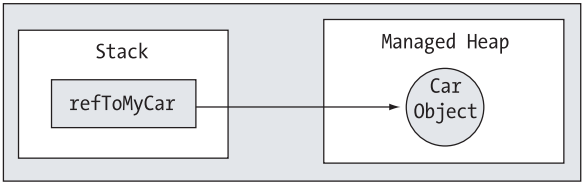


Figure 5-1. *References to objects on the managed heap*

The Basics of Object Lifetime

When you are building your C# applications, you are correct to assume that the managed heap will take care of itself without your direct intervention. In fact, the golden rule of .NET memory management is simple:

- **Rule:** Allocate an object onto the managed heap using the `new` keyword and forget about it.

Once "`new`-ed," the garbage collector will destroy the object when it is no longer needed. The next obvious question, of course, is, "How does the garbage collector determine when an object is no longer needed"? The short (i.e., incomplete) answer is that the garbage collector removes an object from the heap when it is *unreachable* by any part of your code base. Assume you have a method that allocates a local `Car` object:

```
public static void MakeACar()
{
     // If myCar is the only reference to the Car object,
     // it may be destroyed when the method returns.
     Car myCar = new Car();
     ...
}
```

Notice that the Car reference (myCar) has been created directly within the MakeACar() method and has not been passed outside of the defining scope (via a return value or ref/out parameters). Thus, once this method call completes, the myCar reference is no longer reachable, and the associated Car object is now a *candidate* for garbage collection. Understand, however, that you cannot guarantee that this object will be reclaimed from memory immediately after MakeACar() has completed. All you can assume at this point is that when the CLR performs the next garbage collection, the myCar object could be safely destroyed.

As you will most certainly discover, programming in a garbage-collected environment will greatly simplify your application development. In stark contrast, C++ programmers are painfully aware that if they fail to manually delete heap-allocated objects, memory leaks are never far behind. In fact, tracking down memory leaks is one of the most time-consuming (and tedious) aspects of programming with unmanaged languages. By allowing the garbage collector to be in charge of destroying objects, the burden of memory management has been taken from your shoulders and placed onto those of the CLR.

■ **Note** If you happen to have a background in COM development, do know that .NET objects do not maintain an internal reference counter, and therefore managed objects do not expose methods such as AddRef() or Release().

The CIL of new

When the C# compiler encounters the new keyword, it will emit a CIL newobj instruction into the method implementation. If you were to compile the current example code and investigate the resulting assembly using ildasm.exe, you would find the following CIL statements within the MakeACar() method:

```
.method public hidebysig static void MakeACar() cil managed
{
  // Code size  7 (0x7)
  .maxstack  1
  .locals init ([0] class SimpleFinalize.Car c)
  IL_0000:  newobj instance void  SimpleFinalize.Car::.ctor()
  IL_0005:  stloc.0
  IL_0006:  ret
} // end of method Program::MakeACar
```

Before we examine the exact rules that determine when an object is removed from the managed heap, let's check out the role of the CIL newobj instruction in a bit more detail. First, understand that the managed heap is more than just a random chunk of memory accessed by the CLR. The .NET garbage collector is quite a tidy housekeeper of the heap, given that it will compact empty blocks of memory (when necessary) for purposes of optimization. To aid in this endeavor, the managed heap maintains a pointer (commonly referred to as the *next object pointer* or *new object pointer*) that identifies exactly where the next object will be located.

These things being said, the newobj instruction informs the CLR to perform the following core tasks:

- Calculate the total amount of memory required for the object to be allocated (including the necessary memory required by the type's member variables and the type's base classes).
- Examine the managed heap to ensure that there is indeed enough room to host the object to be allocated. If this is the case, the type's constructor is called, and the caller is ultimately returned a reference to the new object in memory, whose address just happens to be identical to the last position of the next object pointer.
- Finally, before returning the reference to the caller, advance the next object pointer to point to the next available slot on the managed heap.

The basic process is illustrated in Figure 5-2.

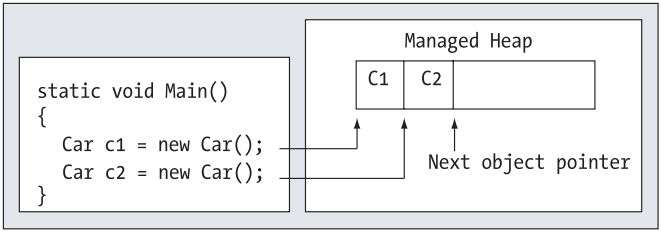


Figure 5-2. *The details of allocating objects onto the managed heap*

As you are busy allocating objects in your application, the space on the managed heap may eventually become full. When processing the `newobj` instruction, if the CLR determines that the managed heap does not have sufficient memory to allocate the requested type, it will perform a garbage collection in an attempt to free up memory. Thus, the next rule of garbage collection is also quite simple.

- **Rule:** If the managed heap does not have sufficient memory to allocate a requested object, a garbage collection will occur.

When a collection does take place, the garbage collector temporarily suspends all active *threads* within the current process to ensure that the application does not access the heap during the collection process. We will examine the topic of threads in Chapter 14; however, for the time being, simply regard a thread as a path of execution within a running executable. Once the garbage collection cycle has completed, the suspended threads are permitted to carry on their work. Thankfully, the .NET garbage collector is highly optimized; you will seldom (if ever) notice this brief interruption in your application.

The Role of Application Roots

Now, back to the topic of how the garbage collector determines when an object is "no longer needed." To understand the details, you need to be aware of the notion of *application roots*. Simply put, a *root* is a storage location containing a reference to an object on the heap. Strictly speaking, a root can fall into any of the following categories:

- References to global objects (while not allowed in C#, CIL code does permit allocation of global objects)
- References to currently used static objects/static fields
- References to local objects within a given method
- References to object parameters passed into a method
- References to objects waiting to be *finalized* (described later in this chapter)
- Any CPU register that references a local object

During a garbage collection process, the runtime will investigate objects on the managed heap to determine if they are still reachable (aka *rooted*) by the application. To do so, the CLR will build an *object graph,* which represents each reachable object on the heap. Object graphs will be seen again during our discussion of object serialization (Chapter 17). For now, just understand that object graphs are used to document all reachable objects. As well, be aware that the garbage collector will never graph the same object twice, thus avoiding the nasty circular reference count found in classic COM programming.

Assume the managed heap contains a set of objects named A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. During a garbage collection, these objects (as well as any internal object references they may contain) are examined for active roots. Once the graph has been constructed, unreachable objects (which we will assume are objects C and F) are marked as garbage. Figure 5-3 diagrams a possible object graph for the scenario just described (you can read the directional arrows using the phrase *depends on* or *requires*, for example, "E depends on G and indirectly B," "A depends on nothing," and so on).

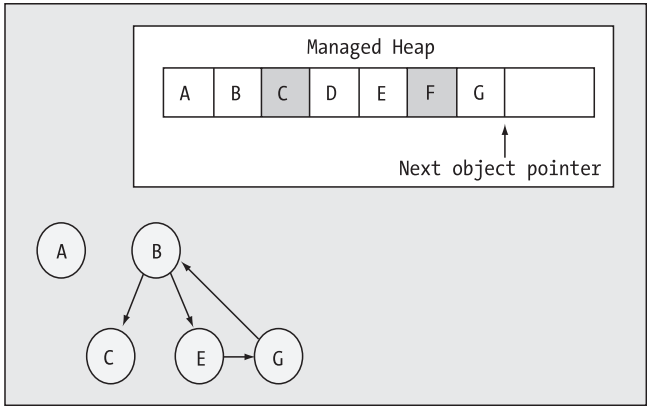


Figure 5-3. *Object graphs are constructed to determine which objects are reachable by application roots.*

Once an object has been marked for termination (C and F in this case—as they are not accounted for in the object graph), they are swept from memory. At this point, the remaining space on the heap is compacted, which in turn will cause the CLR to modify the set of active application roots to refer to the correct memory location (this is done automatically and transparently). Last but not least, the next object pointer is readjusted to point to the next available slot. Figure 5-4 illustrates the resulting readjustment.

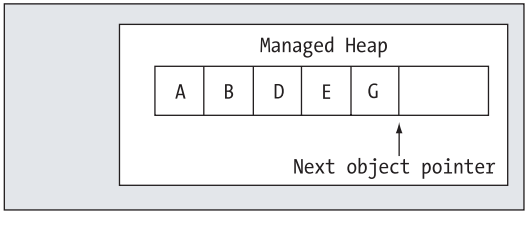


Figure 5-4. *A clean and compacted heap*

■ **Note** Strictly speaking, the garbage collector makes use of *two* distinct heaps, one of which is specifically used to store very large objects. This heap is less frequently consulted during the collection cycle, given possible performance penalties involved with relocating large objects. Regardless of this fact, it is safe to consider the "managed heap" as a single region of memory.

Understanding Object Generations

When the CLR is attempting to locate unreachable objects, is does *not* literally examine each and every object placed on the managed heap. Obviously, doing so would involve considerable time, especially in larger (i.e., real-world) applications.

To help optimize the process, each object on the heap is assigned to a specific "generation." The idea behind generations is simple: The longer an object has existed on the heap, the more likely it is to stay there. For example, the object implementing `Main()` will be in memory until the program terminates. Conversely, objects that have been recently placed on the heap are likely to be unreachable rather quickly (such as an object created within a method scope). Given these assumptions, each object on the heap belongs to one of the following generations:

- *Generation 0*: Identifies a newly allocated object that has never been marked for collection
- *Generation 1*: Identifies an object that has survived a garbage collection (i.e., it was marked for collection, but was not removed due to the fact that the sufficient heap space was acquired)
- *Generation 2*: Identifies an object that has survived more than one sweep of the garbage collector

The garbage collector will investigate all generation 0 objects first. If marking and sweeping these objects results in the required amount of free memory, any surviving objects are promoted to generation 1. To illustrate how an object's generation affects the collection process, ponder Figure 5-5, which diagrams how a set of surviving generation 0 objects (A, B, and E) are promoted once the required memory has been reclaimed.

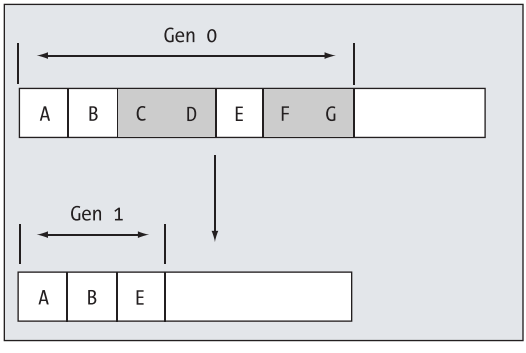


Figure 5-5. *Generation 0 objects that survive a garbage collection are promoted to generation 1.*

If all generation 0 objects have been evaluated, but additional memory is still required, generation 1 objects are then investigated for their "reachability" and collected accordingly. Surviving generation 1 objects are then promoted to generation 2. If the garbage collector *still* requires additional memory, generation 2 objects are then evaluated for their reachability. At this point, if a generation 2 object survives a garbage collection, it remains a generation 2 object given the predefined upper limit of object generations.

The bottom line is that by assigning a generational value to objects on the heap, newer objects (such as local variables) will be removed quickly, while older objects (such as a program's application object) are not "bothered" as often.

The System.GC Type

The base class libraries provide a class type named `System.GC` that allows you to programmatically interact with the garbage collector using a set of static members. Now, do be very aware that you will seldom (if ever) need to make use of this type directly in your code. Typically speaking, the only time you will make use of the members of `System.GC` is when you are creating types that make use of *unmanaged resources*. Table 5-1 provides a rundown of some of the more interesting members (consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK Documentation for complete details).

Table 5-1. *Select Members of the* `System.GC` *Type*

`System.GC` **Member**	**Meaning in Life**
`AddMemoryPressure()`, `RemoveMemoryPressure()`	Allow you to specify a numerical value that represents the calling object's "urgency level" regarding the garbage collection process. Be aware that these methods should alter pressure *in tandem* and thus never remove more pressure than the total amount you have added.
`Collect()`	Forces the GC to perform a garbage collection.
`CollectionCount()`	Returns a numerical value representing how many times a given generation has been swept.
`GetGeneration()`	Returns the generation to which an object currently belongs.
`GetTotalMemory()`	Returns the estimated amount of memory (in bytes) currently allocated on the managed heap. The Boolean parameter specifies whether the call should wait for garbage collection to occur before returning.
`MaxGeneration`	Returns the maximum of generations supported on the target system. Under Microsoft's .NET 2.0, there are three possible generations (0, 1, and 2).
`SuppressFinalize()`	Sets a flag indicating that the specified object should not have its `Finalize()` method called.
`WaitForPendingFinalizers()`	Suspends the current thread until all finalizable objects have been finalized. This method is typically called directly after invoking `GC.Collect()`.

Ponder the following `Main()` method, which illustrates select members of `System.GC`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Print out estimated number of bytes on heap.
    Console.WriteLine("Estimated bytes on heap: {0}",
        GC.GetTotalMemory(false));

    // MaxGeneration is zero based, so add 1 for display purposes.
    Console.WriteLine("This OS has {0} object generations.\n",
        (GC.MaxGeneration + 1));

    Car refToMyCar = new Car("Zippy", 100);
    Console.WriteLine(refToMyCar.ToString());

    // Print out generation of refToMyCar object.
    Console.WriteLine("Generation of refToMyCar is: {0}",
        GC.GetGeneration(refToMyCar));

    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Forcing a Garbage Collection

Again, the whole purpose of the .NET garbage collector is to manage memory on our behalf. However, under some very rare circumstances, it may be beneficial to programmatically force a garbage collection using `GC.Collect()`. Specifically:

- Your application is about to enter into a block of code that you do not wish to be interrupted by a possible garbage collection.
- Your application has just finished allocating an extremely large number of objects and you wish to remove as much of the acquired memory as possible.

If you determine it may be beneficial to have the garbage collector check for unreachable objects, you could explicitly trigger a garbage collection, as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Force a garbage collection and wait for
     // each object to be finalized.
     GC.Collect();
     GC.WaitForPendingFinalizers();
...
}
```

When you manually force a garbage collection, you should always make a call to `GC.WaitForPendingFinalizers()`. With this approach, you can rest assured that all *finalizable objects* have had a chance to perform any necessary cleanup before your program continues forward. Under the hood, `GC.WaitForPendingFinalizers()` will suspend the calling "thread" during the collection process. This is a good thing, as it ensures your code does not invoke methods on an object currently being destroyed!

The `GC.Collect()` method can also be supplied a numerical value that identifies the oldest generation on which a garbage collection will be performed. For example, if you wished to instruct the CLR to only investigate generation 0 objects, you would write the following:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Only investigate generation 0 objects.
    GC.Collect(0);
    GC.WaitForPendingFinalizers();
...
}
```

Like any garbage collection, calling `GC.Collect()` will promote surviving generations. To illustrate, assume that our `Main()` method has been updated as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with System.GC *****\n");

    // Print out estimated number of bytes on heap.
    Console.WriteLine("Estimated bytes on heap: {0}",
        GC.GetTotalMemory(false));

    // MaxGeneration is zero based.
    Console.WriteLine("This OS has {0} object generations.\n",
        (GC.MaxGeneration + 1));
```

```
    Car refToMyCar = new Car("Zippy", 100);
    Console.WriteLine(refToMyCar.ToString());

    // Print out generation of refToMyCar.
    Console.WriteLine("\nGeneration of refToMyCar is: {0}",
        GC.GetGeneration(refToMyCar));

    // Make a ton of objects for testing purposes.
    object[] tonsOfObjects = new object[50000];
    for (int i = 0; i < 50000; i++)
        tonsOfObjects[i] = new object();

    // Collect only gen 0 objects.
    GC.Collect(0);
    GC.WaitForPendingFinalizers();

    // Print out generation of refToMyCar.
    Console.WriteLine("Generation of refToMyCar is: {0}",
        GC.GetGeneration(refToMyCar));

    // See if tonsOfObjects[9000] is still alive.
    if (tonsOfObjects[9000] != null)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Generation of tonsOfObjects[9000] is: {0}",
            GC.GetGeneration(tonsOfObjects[9000]));
    }
    else
        Console.WriteLine("tonsOfObjects[9000] is no longer alive.");

    // Print out how many times a generation has been swept.
    Console.WriteLine("\nGen 0 has been swept {0} times",
        GC.CollectionCount(0));
    Console.WriteLine("Gen 1 has been swept {0} times",
        GC.CollectionCount(1));
    Console.WriteLine("Gen 2 has been swept {0} times",
        GC.CollectionCount(2));
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Here, we have purposely created a very large array of objects for testing purposes. As you can see from the output shown in Figure 5-6, even though this `Main()` method only made one explicit request for a garbage collection, the CLR performed a number of them in the background.

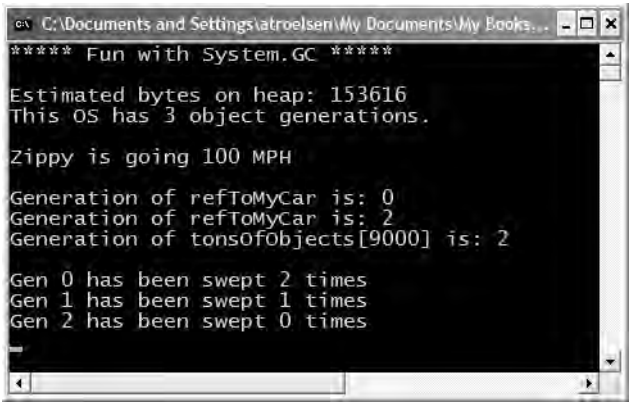

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books...
***** Fun with System.GC *****
Estimated bytes on heap: 153616
This OS has 3 object generations.
Zippy is going 100 MPH
Generation of refToMyCar is: 0
Generation of refToMyCar is: 2
Generation of tonsOfObjects[9000] is: 2
Gen 0 has been swept 2 times
Gen 1 has been swept 1 times
Gen 2 has been swept 0 times

Figure 5-6. *Interacting with the CLR garbage collector via* `System.GC`

At this point in the chapter, I hope you feel more comfortable regarding the details of object lifetime. The remainder of this chapter examines the garbage collection process a bit further by addressing how you can build *finalizable objects* as well as *disposable objects*. Be very aware that the following techniques will only be useful if you are build managed classes that maintain internal unmanaged resources.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleGC project is included under the Chapter 5 subdirectory.

Building Finalizable Objects

In Chapter 3, you learned that the supreme base class of .NET, `System.Object`, defines a virtual method named `Finalize()`. The default implementation of this method does nothing whatsoever:

```
// System.Object
public class Object
{
    ...
    protected virtual void Finalize() {}
}
```

When you override `Finalize()` for your custom classes, you establish a specific location to perform any necessary cleanup logic for your type. Given that this member is defined as protected, it is not possible to directly call an object's `Finalize()` method. Rather, the *garbage collector* will call an object's `Finalize()` method (if supported) before removing the object from memory.

Of course, a call to `Finalize()` will (eventually) occur during a "natural" garbage collection or when you programmatically force a collection via `GC.Collect()`. In addition, a type's finalizer method will automatically be called when the *application domain* hosting your application is unloaded from memory. Based on your current background in .NET, you may know that application domains (or simply AppDomains) are used to host an executable assembly and any necessary external code libraries. If you are not familiar with this .NET concept, you will be by the time you've finished Chapter 13. The short answer is that when your AppDomain is unloaded from memory, the CLR automatically invokes finalizers for every finalizable object created during its lifetime.

Now, despite what your developer instincts may tell you, a *vast majority* of your C# classes will not require any explicit cleanup logic. The reason is simple: If your types are simply making use of other managed objects, everything will eventually be garbage collected. The only time you would need to design a class that can clean up after itself is when you are making use of *unmanaged resources* (such as raw OS file handles, raw unmanaged database connections, or other unmanaged resources). As you may know, unmanaged resources are obtained by directly calling into the API of the operating system using PInvoke (platform invocation) services or due to some very elaborate COM interoperability scenarios. Given this, consider the next rule of garbage collection:

- **Rule:** The only reason to override `Finalize()` is if your C# class is making use of unmanaged resources via PInvoke or complex COM interoperability tasks (typically via the `System.Runtime.InteropServices.Marshal` type).

■ **Note** Recall from Chapter 3 that it is illegal to override `Finalize()` on structure types. This makes perfect sense given that structures are value types, which are never allocated on the heap to begin with.

Overriding System.Object.Finalize()

In the rare case that you do build a C# class that makes use of unmanaged resources, you will obviously wish to ensure that the underlying memory is released in a predictable manner. Assume you have created a class named `MyResourceWrapper` that makes use of an unmanaged resource (whatever that may be) and you wish to override `Finalize()`. The odd thing about doing so in C# is that you cannot do so using the expected `override` keyword:

```
public class MyResourceWrapper
{
     // Compile time error!
     protected override void Finalize(){ }
}
```

Rather, when you wish to configure your custom C# class types to override the `Finalize()` method, you make use of the following (C++-like) destructor syntax to achieve the same effect. The reason for this alternative form of overriding a virtual method is that when the C# compiler processes a destructor, it will automatically add a good deal of required infrastructure within the `Finalize()` method (shown in just a moment).

Here is a custom finalizer for `MyResourceWrapper` that will issue a system beep when invoked. Obviously this is only for instructional purposes. A real-world finalizer would do nothing more than free any unmanaged resources and would *not* interact with the members of other managed objects, as you cannot assume they are still alive at the point the garbage collector invokes your `Finalize()` method:

```
// Override System.Object.Finalize() via destructor syntax.
class MyResourceWrapper
{
     ~MyResourceWrapper()
     {
          // Clean up unmanaged resources here.

          // Beep when destroyed (testing purposes only!)
          Console.Beep();
     }
}
```

If you were to examine this C# destructor using `ilasm.exe`, you will see that the compiler inserts some necessary error checking code. First, the code statements within the scope of your `Finalize()` method are placed within a `try` block. This bit of syntax is used to hold code statements that may trigger a runtime error (formally termed an *exception*) during their execution. The related `finally` block ensures that your base classes' `Finalize()` method will always execute, regardless of any exceptions encountered within the `try` scope. You'll investigate the formalities of structured exception handling in the next chapter; however, ponder the following CIL representation of `MyResourceWrapper`'s C# destructor:

```
.method family hidebysig virtual instance void
     Finalize() cil managed
{
     // Code size       13 (0xd)
     .maxstack  1
     .try
     {
          IL_0000:  ldc.i4     0x4e20
          IL_0005:  ldc.i4     0x3e8
          IL_000a:  call
             void [mscorlib]System.Console::Beep(int32, int32)
          IL_000f:  nop
          IL_0010:  nop
          IL_0011:  leave.s    IL_001b
     }  // end .try
     finally
     {
          IL_0013:  ldarg.0
          IL_0014:
               call instance void [mscorlib]System.Object::Finalize()
          IL_0019:  nop
          IL_001a:  endfinally
     }  // end handler
     IL_001b:  nop
     IL_001c:  ret
} // end of method MyResourceWrapper::Finalize
```

If you were to now test the `MyResourceWrapper` type, you would find that a system beep occurs when the application terminates, given that the CLR will automatically invoke finalizers upon AppDomain shutdown:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Finalizers *****\n");
     Console.WriteLine("Hit the return key to shut down this app");
     Console.WriteLine("and force the GC to invoke Finalize()");
     Console.WriteLine("for finalizable objects created in this AppDomain.");
     Console.ReadLine();
     MyResourceWrapper rw = new MyResourceWrapper();
}
```

■ **Source Code** The SimpleFinalize project is included under the Chapter 5 subdirectory.

Detailing the Finalization Process

Not to beat a dead horse, but always remember that the role of the `Finalize()` method is to ensure that a .NET object can clean up unmanaged resources when garbage collected. Thus, if you are building a type that does not make use of unmanaged entities (by far the most common case), finalization is of little use. In fact, if at all possible, you should design your types to avoid supporting a `Finalize()` method for the very simple reason that finalization takes time.

When you allocate an object onto the managed heap, the runtime automatically determines whether your object supports a custom `Finalize()` method. If so, the object is marked as *finalizable*, and a pointer to this object is stored on an internal queue named the *finalization queue*. The finalization queue is a table maintained by the garbage collector that points to each and every object that must be finalized before it is removed from the heap.

When the garbage collector determines it is time to free an object from memory, it examines each entry on the finalization queue, and copies the object off the heap to yet another managed structure termed the *finalization reachable* table (often abbreviated as freachable, and pronounced "eff-reachable"). At this point, a separate thread is spawned to invoke the `Finalize()` method for each object on the freachable table *at the next garbage collection*. Given this, it will take at very least *two* garbage collections to truly finalize an object.

The bottom line is that while finalization of an object does ensure an object can clean up unmanaged resources, it is still nondeterministic in nature, and due to the extra behind-the-curtains processing, considerably slower.

Building Disposable Objects

Given that so many unmanaged resources are "precious items" that should be cleaned up ASAP, allow me to introduce you to another possible technique used to handle an object's cleanup. As an alternative to overriding `Finalize()`, your class could implement the `IDisposable` interface, which defines a single method named `Dispose()`:

```
public interface IDisposable
{
     void Dispose();
}
```

If you are new to interface-based programming, Chapter 7 will take you through the details. In a nutshell, an interface as a collection of abstract members a class or structure may support. When you do support the `IDisposable` interface, the assumption is that when the *object user* is finished using the object, it manually calls `Dispose()` before allowing the object reference to drop out of scope. In this way, your objects can perform any necessary cleanup of unmanaged resources without incurring the hit of being placed on the finalization queue and without waiting for the garbage collector to trigger the class's finalization logic.

■ **Note** Structures and class types can both support `IDisposable` (unlike overriding `Finalize()`, which is reserved for class types).

Here is an updated `MyResourceWrapper` class that now implements `IDisposable`, rather than overriding `System.Object.Finalize()`:

```
// Implementing IDisposable.
public class MyResourceWrapper : IDisposable
{
```

```
    // The object user should call this method
    // when they finished with the object.
    public void Dispose()
    {
        // Clean up unmanaged resources here.

        // Dispose other contained disposable objects.
    }
}
```

Notice that a `Dispose()` method is not only responsible for releasing the type's unmanaged resources, but should also call `Dispose()` on any other contained disposable methods. Unlike `Finalize()`, it is perfectly safe to communicate with other managed objects within a `Dispose()` method. The reason is simple: The garbage collector has no clue about the `IDisposable` interface and will never call `Dispose()`. Therefore, when the object user calls this method, the object is still living a productive life on the managed heap and has access to all other heap-allocated objects. The calling logic is straightforward:

```
public class Program
{
    static void Main()
    {
        MyResourceWrapper rw = new MyResourceWrapper();
        rw.Dispose();
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Of course, before you attempt to call `Dispose()` on an object, you will want to ensure the type supports the `IDisposable` interface. While you will typically know which objects implement `IDisposable` by consulting the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation, a programmatic check can be accomplished using the `is` or `as` keywords discussed in Chapter 4:

```
public class Program
{
    static void Main()
    {
        MyResourceWrapper rw = new MyResourceWrapper();
        if (rw is IDisposable)
            rw.Dispose();
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

This example exposes yet another rule of working with garbage-collected types.

- **Rule:** Always call `Dispose()` on any object you directly create if the object supports `IDisposable`. The assumption you should make is that if the class designer chose to support the `Dispose()` method, the type has some cleanup to perform.

Reusing the C# using Keyword

When you are handling a managed object that implements `IDisposable`, it will be quite common to make use of structured exception handling (again, see Chapter 6) to ensure the type's `Dispose()` method is called in the event of a runtime exception:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    MyResourceWrapper rw = new MyResourceWrapper ();
    try
    {
        // Use the members of rw.
    }
    finally
    {
        // Always call Dispose(), error or not.
        rw.Dispose();
    }
}
```

While this is a fine example of defensive programming, the truth of the matter is that few developers are thrilled by the prospects of wrapping each and every disposable type within a `try/catch/finally` block just to ensure the `Dispose()` method is called. To achieve the same result in a much less obtrusive manner, C# supports a special bit of syntax that looks like this:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Dispose() is called automatically when the
    // using scope exits.
    using(MyResourceWrapper rw = new MyResourceWrapper())
    {
        // Use rw object.
    }
}
```

If you were to look at the CIL code of the `Main()` method using `ildasm.exe`, you will find the `using` syntax does indeed expand to `try/final` logic, with the expected call to `Dispose()`:

```
.method private hidebysig static void Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
...
     .try
     {
          ...
     }  // end .try
     finally
     {
...
          IL_0012:  callvirt instance void
               SimpleFinalize.MyResourceWrapper::Dispose()
     }  // end handler
...
} // end of method Program::Main
```

■ **Note** If you attempt to "use" an object that does not implement `IDisposable`, you will receive a compiler error.

While this syntax does remove the need to manually wrap disposable objects within `try/finally` logic, the C# `using` keyword unfortunately now has a double meaning (specifying namespaces and invoking a `Dispose()` method). Nevertheless, when you are working with .NET types that support the `IDisposable` interface, this syntactical construct will ensure that the object "being used" will automatically have its `Dispose()` method called once the `using` block has exited.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleDispose project is included under the Chapter 5 subdirectory.

Building Finalizable and Disposable Types

At this point, we have seen two different approaches to construct a class that cleans up internal unmanaged resources. On the one hand, we could override `System.Object.Finalize()`. Using this technique, we have the peace of mind that comes with knowing the object cleans itself up when garbage collected (whenever that may be) without the need for user interaction. On the other hand, we could implement `IDisposable` to provide a way for the object user to clean up the object as soon as it is finished. However, if the caller forgets to call `Dispose()`, the unmanaged resources may be held in memory indefinitely.

As you might suspect, it is possible to blend both techniques into a single class definition. By doing so, you gain the best of both models. If the object user *does* remember to call `Dispose()`, you can inform the garbage collector to bypass the finalization process by calling `GC.SuppressFinalize()`. If the object user *forgets* to call `Dispose()`, the object will eventually be finalized. The good news is that the object's internal unmanaged resources will be freed one way or another. Here is the next iteration of `MyResourceWrapper`, which is now finalizable and disposable:

```
// A sophisticated resource wrapper.
public class MyResourceWrapper : IDisposable
{
     // The garbage collector will call this method if the
     // object user forgets to call Dispose().
     ~ MyResourceWrapper()
     {
          // Clean up any internal unmanaged resources.
          // Do **not** call Dispose() on any managed objects.
     }

     // The object user will call this method to clean up
     // resources ASAP.
     public void Dispose()
     {
          // Clean up unmanaged resources here.
          // Call Dispose() on other contained disposable objects.

          // No need to finalize if user called Dispose(),
          // so suppress finalization.
          GC.SuppressFinalize(this);
     }
}
```

Notice that this `Dispose()` method has been updated to call `GC.SuppressFinalize()`, which informs the CLR that it is no longer necessary to call the destructor when this object is garbage collected, given that the unmanaged resources have already been freed via the `Dispose()` logic.

A Formalized Disposal Pattern

The current implementation of `MyResourceWrapper` does work fairly well; however, we are left with a few minor drawbacks. First, the `Finalize()` and `Dispose()` method each have to clean up the same unmanaged resources. This of course results in duplicate code, which can easily become a nightmare to maintain. Ideally, you would define a private helper function that is called by either method.

Next, you would like to make sure that the `Finalize()` method does not attempt to dispose of any managed objects, while the `Dispose()` method should do so. Finally, you would also like to make sure that the object user can safely call `Dispose()` multiple times without error. Currently our `Dispose()` method has no such safeguards.

To address these design issues, Microsoft has defined a formal, prim-and-proper disposal pattern that strikes a balance between robustness, maintainability, and performance. Here is the final (and annotated) version of `MyResourceWrapper`, which makes use of this official pattern:

```
public class MyResourceWrapper : IDisposable
{
    // Used to determine if Dispose()
    // has already been called.
    private bool disposed = false;

    public void Dispose()
    {
        // Call our helper method.
        // Specifying "true" signifies that
        // the object user triggered the clean up.
        CleanUp(true);

        // Now suppress finialization.
        GC.SuppressFinalize(this);
    }

    private void CleanUp(bool disposing)
    {
        // Be sure we have not already been disposed!
        if (!this.disposed)
        {
           // If disposing equals true, dispose all
           // managed resources.
            if (disposing)
            {
                // Dispose managed resources.
            }
           // Clean up unmanaged resources here.
        }
        disposed = true;
    }

    ~MyResourceWrapper()
    {
        // Call our helper method.
        // Specifying "false" signifies that
        // the GC triggered the clean up.
        CleanUp(false);
    }
}
```

Notice that `MyResourceWrapper` now defines a private helper method named `CleanUp()`. When specifying `true` as an argument, we are signifying that the object user has initiated the cleanup, therefore we should clean up all managed *and* unmanaged resources. However, when the garbage collector initiates the cleanup, we specify `false` when calling `CleanUp()` to ensure that internal disposable objects are *not* disposed (as we can't assume they are still in memory!). Last but not least, our Boolean member variable (`disposed`) is set to true before exiting `CleanUp()` to ensure that `Dispose()` can be called numerous times without error.

■ **Source Code** The FinalizableDisposableClass project is included under the Chapter 5 subdirectory.

That wraps up our investigation of how the CLR is managing your objects via garbage collection. While there are additional details regarding the collection process I have not examined here (such as weak references and object resurrection), you are certainly in a perfect position for further exploration on your own terms.

Summary

The point of this chapter was to demystify the garbage collection process. As you have seen, the garbage collector will only run when it is unable to acquire the necessary memory from the managed heap (or when a given AppDomain unloads from memory). When a collection does occur, you can rest assured that Microsoft's collection algorithm as been optimized by the use of object generations, secondary threads for the purpose of object finalization, and a managed heap dedicated to host large objects.

This chapter also illustrated how to programmatically interact with the garbage collector using the `System.GC` class type. As mentioned, the only time when you will really need to do so is when you are building finalizable or disposable class types. Recall that finalizable types are classes that have overridden the virtual `System.Object.Finalize()` method to clean up unmanaged resources (at some time in the future). Disposable objects, on the other hand, are classes (or structures) that implement the `IDisposable` interface. Using this technique, you expose a public method to the object user that can be called to perform internal cleanup ASAP. Finally, you learned about an official "disposal" pattern that blends both approaches.

CHAPTER 6

Understanding Structured Exception Handling

The point of this chapter is to understand how to handle runtime anomalies in your C# code base through the use of *structured exception handling*. Not only will you learn about the C# keywords that allow you to handle such matters (`try`, `catch`, `throw`, `finally`), but you will also come to understand the distinction between application-level and system-level exceptions. This discussion will also provide a lead-in to the topic of building custom exceptions, as well as how to leverage the exception-centric debugging tools of Visual Studio 2005.

Ode to Errors, Bugs, and Exceptions

Despite what our (sometimes inflated) egos may tell us, no programmer is perfect. Writing software is a complex undertaking, and given this complexity, it is quite common for even the best software to ship with various *problems*. Sometimes the problem is caused by "bad code" (such as overflowing the bounds of an array). Other times, a problem is caused by bogus user input that has not been accounted for in the application's code base (e.g., a phone number field assigned "Chucky"). Now, regardless of the cause of said problem, the end result is that your application does not work as expected. To help frame the upcoming discussion of structured exception handling, allow me to provide definitions for three commonly used anomaly-centric terms:

- *Bugs*: This is, simply put, an error on the part of the programmer. For example, assume you are programming with unmanaged C++. If you make calls on a `NULL` pointer or fail to delete allocated memory (resulting in a memory leak), you have a bug.
- *User errors*: Unlike bugs, user errors are typically caused by the individual running your application, rather than by those who created it. For example, an end user who enters a malformed string into a text box could very well generate an error *if* you fail to handle this faulty input in your code base.
- *Exceptions*: Exceptions are typically regarded as runtime anomalies that are difficult, if not impossible, to account for while programming your application. Possible exceptions include attempting to connect to a database that no longer exists, opening a corrupted file, or contacting a machine that is currently offline. In each of these cases, the programmer (and end user) has little control over these "exceptional" circumstances.

Given the previous definitions, it should be clear that .NET structured *exception* handling is a technique well suited to deal with runtime *exceptions*. However, as for the bugs and user errors that have escaped your view, the CLR will often generate a corresponding exception that identifies the problem at hand. The .NET base class libraries define numerous exceptions such as `FormatException`, `IndexOutOfRangeException`, `FileNotFoundException`, `ArgumentOutOfRangeException`, and so forth.

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let's formalize the role of structured exception handling and check out how it differs from traditional error handling techniques.

■ **Note** To make the code examples used in this book as clean as possible, I will *not* catch every possible exception that may be thrown by a given method in the base class libraries. In your production-level projects, you should, of course, make liberal use of the techniques presented in this chapter.

The Role of .NET Exception Handling

Prior to .NET, error handling under the Windows operating system was a confused mishmash of techniques. Many programmers rolled their own error handling logic within the context of a given application. For example, a development team may define a set of numerical constants that represent known error conditions, and make use of them as method return values. By way of an example, ponder the following partial C code:

```
/* A very C-style error trapping mechanism. */
#define E_FILENOTFOUND 1000

int SomeFunction()
{
    // Assume something happens in this f(x)
    // that causes the following return value.
    return E_FILENOTFOUND;
}

void Main()
{
    int retVal = SomeFunction();
    if(retVal == E_FILENOTFOUND)
         printf("Cannot find file...");
}
```

This approach is less than ideal, given the fact that the constant `E_FILENOTFOUND` is little more than a numerical value, and is far from being a helpful agent regarding how to deal with the problem. Ideally, you would like to wrap the name, message, and other helpful information regarding this error condition into a single, well-defined package (which is exactly what happens under structured exception handling).

In addition to a developer's ad hoc techniques, the Windows API defines hundreds of error codes that come by way of `#defines`, `HRESULTs`, and far too many variations on the simple Boolean (`bool`, `BOOL`, `VARIANT_BOOL`, and so on). Also, many C++ COM developers (and indirectly, many VB6 COM developers) have made use of a small set of standard COM interfaces (e.g., `ISupportErrorInfo`, `IErrorInfo`, `ICreateErrorInfo`) to return meaningful error information to a COM client.

The obvious problem with these previous techniques is the tremendous lack of symmetry. Each approach is more or less tailored to a given technology, a given language, and perhaps even a given project. In order to put an end to this madness, the .NET platform provides a standard technique to send and trap runtime errors: structured exception handling (SEH).

The beauty of this approach is that developers now have a unified approach to error handling, which is common to all languages targeting the .NET universe. Therefore, the way in which a C# programmer handles errors is syntactically similar to that of a VB .NET programmer, and a C++ programmer using managed extensions. As an added bonus, the syntax used to throw and catch exceptions across assemblies and machine boundaries is identical.

Another bonus of .NET exceptions is the fact that rather than receiving a cryptic numerical value that identifies the problem at hand, exceptions are objects that contain a human-readable description of the problem, as well as a detailed snapshot of the call stack that triggered the exception in the first place. Furthermore, you are able to provide the end user with help link information that points the user to a URL that provides detailed information regarding the error at hand as well as custom user-defined data.

The Atoms of .NET Exception Handling

Programming with structured exception handling involves the use of four interrelated entities:

- A class type that represents the details of the exception that occurred
- A member that *throws* an instance of the exception class to the caller
- A block of code on the caller's side that invokes the exception-prone member
- A block of code on the caller's side that will process (or *catch*) the exception should it occur

The C# programming language offers four keywords (`try`, `catch`, `throw`, and `finally`) that allow you to throw and handle exceptions. The type that represents the problem at hand is a class derived from `System.Exception` (or a descendent thereof). Given this fact, let's check out the role of this exception-centric base class.

The System.Exception Base Class

All user- and system-defined exceptions ultimately derive from the `System.Exception` base class (which in turn derives from `System.Object`). Note that some of these members are virtual and may thus be overridden by derived types:

```
public class Exception : ISerializable, _Exception
{
    public virtual IDictionary Data { get; }
    protected Exception(SerializationInfo info, StreamingContext context);
    public Exception(string message, Exception innerException);
    public Exception(string message);
    public Exception();
    public virtual Exception GetBaseException();
    public virtual void GetObjectData(SerializationInfo info,
        StreamingContext context);
    public System.Type GetType();
    protected int HResult { get; set; }
    public virtual string HelpLink { get; set; }
    public System.Exception InnerException { get; }
    public virtual string Message { get; }
    public virtual string Source { get; set; }
    public virtual string StackTrace { get; }
    public MethodBase TargetSite { get; }
    public override string ToString();
}
```

As you can see, many of the properties defined by `System.Exception` are read-only in nature. This is due to the simple fact that derived types will typically supply default values for each property (for example, the default message of the `IndexOutOfRangeException` type is "Index was outside the bounds of the array").

■ **Note** As of .NET 2.0, the `_Exception` interface is implemented by `System.Exception` to expose its functionality to unmanaged code.

Table 6-1 describes the details of some (but not all) of the members of `System.Exception`.

Table 6-1. *Core Members of the* `System.Exception` *Type*

`System.Exception` **Property**	**Meaning in Life**
`Data`	This property (which is new to .NET 2.0) retrieves a collection of key/value pairs (represented by an object implementing `IDictionary`) that provides additional, user-defined information about the exception. By default, this collection is empty.
`HelpLink`	This property returns a URL to a help file describing the error in full detail.
`InnerException`	This read-only property can be used to obtain information about the previous exception(s) that caused the current exception to occur. The previous exception(s) are recorded by passing them into the constructor of the most current exception.
`Message`	This read-only property returns the textual description of a given error. The error message itself is set as a constructor parameter.
`Source`	This property returns the name of the assembly that threw the exception.
`StackTrace`	This read-only property contains a string that identifies the sequence of calls that triggered the exception. As you might guess, this property is very useful during debugging.
`TargetSite`	This read-only property returns a `MethodBase` type, which describes numerous details about the method that threw the exception (`ToString()` will identify the method by name).

The Simplest Possible Example

To illustrate the usefulness of structured exception handling, we need to create a type that may throw an exception under the correct circumstances. Assume we have created a new console application project (named SimpleException) that defines two class types (`Car` and `Radio`) associated using the "has-a" relationship. The `Radio` type defines a single method that turns the radio's power on or off:

```
public class Radio
{
     public void TurnOn(bool on)
     {
          if(on)
               Console.WriteLine("Jamming...");
          else
               Console.WriteLine("Quiet time...");
     }
}
```

In addition to leveraging the Radio type via containment/delegation, the Car type is defined in such a way that if the user accelerates a Car object beyond a predefined maximum speed (specified using a constant member variable), its engine explodes, rendering the Car unusable (captured by a bool member variable named carIsDead). Beyond these points, the Car type has a few member variables to represent the current speed and a user supplied "pet name" as well as various constructors. Here is the complete definition (with code annotations):

```
public class Car
{
     // Constant for maximum speed.
     public const int maxSpeed = 100;

     // Internal state data.
     private int currSpeed;
     private string petName;

     // Is the car still operational?
     private bool carIsDead;

     // A car has-a radio.
     private Radio theMusicBox = new Radio();

     // Constructors.
     public Car() {}
     public Car(string name, int currSp)
     {
          currSpeed = currSp;
          petName = name;
     }

     public void CrankTunes(bool state)
     {
          // Delegate request to inner object.
          theMusicBox.TurnOn(state);
     }

     // See if Car has overheated.
     public void Accelerate(int delta)
     {
          if (carIsDead)
               Console.WriteLine("{0} is out of order...", petName);
          else
          {
                 currSpeed += delta;
                 if (currSpeed > maxSpeed)
                 {
                     Console.WriteLine("{0} has overheated!", petName);
                     currSpeed = 0;
                     carIsDead = true;
                 }
                 else
                     Console.WriteLine("=> CurrSpeed = {0}", currSpeed);
          }
     }
}
```

Now, if we were to implement a `Main()` method that forces a `Car` object to exceed the predefined maximum speed (represented by the `maxSpeed` constant) as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Creating a car and stepping on it *****");
     Car myCar = new Car("Zippy", 20);
     myCar.CrankTunes(true);

     for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
          myCar.Accelerate(10);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

we would see the output displayed in Figure 6-1.

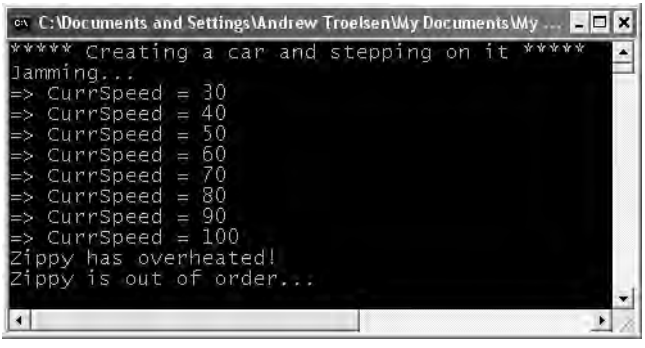

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My ...
***** Creating a car and stepping on it *****
Jamming...
=> CurrSpeed = 30
=> CurrSpeed = 40
=> CurrSpeed = 50
=> CurrSpeed = 60
=> CurrSpeed = 70
=> CurrSpeed = 80
=> CurrSpeed = 90
=> CurrSpeed = 100
Zippy has overheated!
Zippy is out of order...

Figure 6-1. *The* `Car` *in action*

Throwing a Generic Exception

Now that we have a functional `Car` type, I'll illustrate the simplest way to throw an exception. The current implementation of `Accelerate()` displays an error message if the caller attempts to speed up the `Car` beyond its upper limit.

To retrofit this method to throw an exception if the user attempts to speed up the automobile after it has met its maker, you want to create and configure a new instance of the `System.Exception` class, setting the value of the read-only `Message` property via the class constructor. When you wish to send the error object back to the caller, make use of the C# `throw` keyword. Here is the relevant code update to the `Accelerate()` method:

```
// This time, throw an exception if the user speeds up beyond maxSpeed.
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
     if (carIsDead)
          Console.WriteLine("{0} is out of order...", petName);
     else
     {
          currSpeed += delta;
          if (currSpeed >= maxSpeed)
          {
               carIsDead = true;
               currSpeed = 0;
```

```
            // Use "throw" keyword to raise an exception.
            throw new Exception(string.Format("{0} has overheated!", petName));
        }
        else
            Console.WriteLine("=> CurrSpeed = {0}", currSpeed);
    }
}
```

Before examining how a caller would catch this exception, a few points of interest. First of all, when you are throwing an exception, it is always up to you to decide exactly what constitutes the error in question, and when it should be thrown. Here, you are making the assumption that if the program attempts to increase the speed of a car that has expired, a `System.Exception` type should be thrown to indicate the `Accelerate()` method cannot continue (which may or may not be a valid assumption).

Alternatively, you could implement `Accelerate()` to recover automatically without needing to throw an exception in the first place. By and large, exceptions should be thrown only when a more terminal condition has been met (for example, not finding a necessary file, failing to connect to a database, and whatnot). Deciding exactly what constitutes throwing an exception is a design issue you must always contend with. For our current purposes, assume that asking a doomed automobile to increase its speed justifies a cause to throw an exception.

Catching Exceptions

Because the `Accelerate()` method now throws an exception, the caller needs to be ready to handle the exception should it occur. When you are invoking a method that may throw an exception, you make use of a `try/catch` block. Once you have caught the exception type, you are able to invoke the members of the `System.Exception` type to extract the details of the problem. What you do with this data is largely up to you. You may wish to log this information to a report file, write the data to the Windows event log, e-mail a system administrator, or display the problem to the end user. Here, you will simply dump the contents to the console window:

```
// Handle the thrown exception.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Creating a car and stepping on it *****");
    Car myCar = new Car("Zippy", 20);
    myCar.CrankTunes(true);

    // Speed up past the car's max speed to
    // trigger the exception.
    try
    {
        for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
            myCar. Accelerate(10);
    }
    catch(Exception e)
    {
       Console.WriteLine("\n*** Error! ***");
       Console.WriteLine("Method: {0}", e.TargetSite);
       Console.WriteLine("Message: {0}", e.Message);
       Console.WriteLine("Source: {0}", e.Source);
    }

    // The error has been handled, processing continues with the next statement.
    Console.WriteLine("\n***** Out of exception logic *****");
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

In essence, a `try` block is a section of statements that may throw an exception during execution. If an exception is detected, the flow of program execution is sent to the appropriate `catch` block. On the other hand, if the code within a `try` block does not trigger an exception, the `catch` block is skipped entirely, and all is right with the world. Figure 6-2 shows a test run of this program.

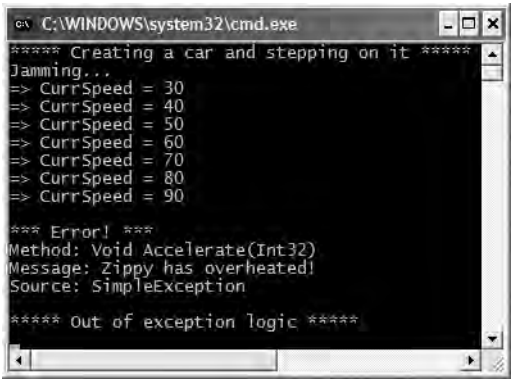


Figure 6-2. *Dealing with the error using structured exception handling*

As you can see, once an exception has been handled, the application is free to continue on from the point after the `catch` block. In some circumstances, a given exception may be critical enough to warrant the termination of the application. However, in a good number of cases, the logic within the exception handler will ensure the application will be able to continue on its merry way (although it may be slightly less functional, such as the case of not being able to connect to a remote data source).

Configuring the State of an Exception

Currently, the `System.Exception` object configured within the `Accelerate()` method simply establishes a value exposed to the `Message` property (via a constructor parameter). As shown in Table 6-1, however, the `Exception` class also supplies a number of additional members (`TargetSite`, `StackTrace`, `HelpLink`, and `Data`) that can be useful in further qualifying the nature of the problem. To spruce up our current example, let's examine further details of these members on a case-by-case basis.

The TargetSite Property

The `System.Exception.TargetSite` property allows you to determine various details about the method that threw a given exception. As shown in the previous `Main()` method, printing the value of `TargetSet` will display the return value, name, and parameters of the method that threw the exception. However, `TargetSite` does not simply return a vanilla-flavored string, but a strongly typed `System.Reflection.MethodBase` object. This type can be used to gather numerous details regarding the offending method as well as the class that defines the offending method. To illustrate, assume the previous `catch` logic has been updated as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
```

```
    // TargetSite actually returns a MethodBase object.
    catch(Exception e)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("\n*** Error! ***");
        Console.WriteLine("Member name: {0}", e.TargetSite);
        Console.WriteLine("Class defining member: {0}",
            e.TargetSite.DeclaringType);
        Console.WriteLine("Member type: {0}", e.TargetSite.MemberType);
        Console.WriteLine("Message: {0}", e.Message);
        Console.WriteLine("Source: {0}", e.Source);
    }
      Console.WriteLine("\n***** Out of exception logic *****");
        myCar.Accelerate(10);  // Will not speed up car.
      Console.ReadLine();
}
```

This time, you make use of the `MethodBase.DeclaringType` property to determine the fully qualified name of the class that threw the error (`SimpleException.Car` in this case) as well as the `MemberType` property of the `MethodBase` object to identify the type of member (such as a property versus a method) where this exception originated. Figure 6-3 shows the updated output.

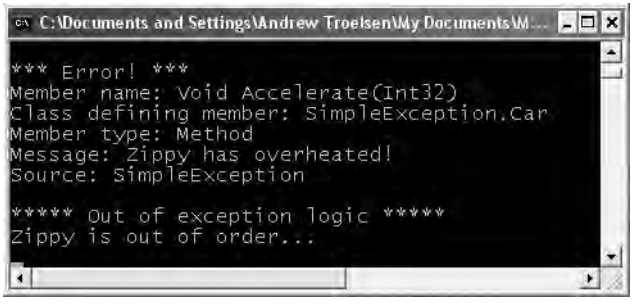

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\M...
*** Error! ***
Member name: Void Accelerate(Int32)
Class defining member: SimpleException.Car
Member type: Method
Message: Zippy has overheated!
Source: SimpleException
***** Out of exception logic *****
Zippy is out of order...

Figure 6-3. *Obtaining aspects of the target site*

The StackTrace Property

The `System.Exception.StackTrace` property allows you to identify the series of calls that resulted in the exception. Be aware that you never set the value of `StackTrace` as it is established automatically at the time the exception is created. To illustrate, assume you have once again updated your `catch` logic:

```
catch(Exception e)
{
    ...
    Console.WriteLine("Stack: {0}", e.StackTrace);
}
```

If you were to run the program, you would find the following stack trace is printed to the console (your line numbers and application folder may differ, of course):

```
Stack: at SimpleException.Car.Accelerate(Int32 delta)
in c:\myapps\exceptions\car.cs:line 65
at Exceptions.App.Main()
in c:\myapps\exceptions\app.cs:line 21
```

The string returned from StackTrace documents the sequence of calls that resulted in the throwing of this exception. Notice how the bottommost line number of this string identifies the first call in the sequence, while the topmost line number identifies the exact location of the offending member. Clearly, this information can be quite helpful during the debugging of a given application, as you are able to "follow the flow" of the error's origin.

The HelpLink Property

While the TargetSite and StackTrace properties allow programmers to gain an understanding of a given exception, this information is of little use to the end user. As you have already seen, the System.Exception.Message property can be used to obtain human-readable information that may be displayed to the current user. In addition, the HelpLink property can be set to point the user to a specific URL or standard Windows help file that contains more detailed information.

By default, the value managed by the HelpLink property is an empty string. If you wish to fill this property with an interesting value, you will need to do so before throwing the System.Exception type. Here are the relevant updates to the Car.Accelerate() method:

```
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
     if (carIsDead)
          Console.WriteLine("{0} is out of order...", petName);
     else
     {
          currSpeed += delta;
          if (currSpeed >= maxSpeed)
          {
               carIsDead = true;
               currSpeed = 0;

              // We need to call the HelpLink property, thus we need to
               // create a local variable before throwing the Exception object.
               Exception ex =
                    new Exception(string.Format("{0} has overheated!", petName));
               ex.HelpLink = "http://www.CarsRUs.com";
               throw ex;
          }
          else
               Console.WriteLine("=> CurrSpeed = {0}", currSpeed);
     }
}
```

The catch logic could now be updated to print out this help link information as follows:

```
catch(Exception e)
{
     ...
     Console.WriteLine("Help Link: {0}", e.HelpLink);
}
```

The Data Property

The Data property of System.Exception is new to .NET 2.0, and allows you to fill an exception object with relevant user-supplied information (such as a time stamp or what have you). The Data property returns an object implementing an interface named IDictionary, defined in the System.Collection namespace. The next chapter examines the role of interface-based programming as well as the System.Collections namespace. For the time being, just understand that dictionary collections allow

you to create a set of values that are retrieved using a specific key value. Observe the next relevant update to the `Car.Accelerate()` method:

```
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
     if (carIsDead)
          Console.WriteLine("{0} is out of order...", petName);
     else
     {
          currSpeed += delta;
          if (currSpeed >= maxSpeed)
          {
               carIsDead = true;
               currSpeed = 0;

               // We need to call the HelpLink property, thus we need
               // to create a local variable before throwing the Exception object.
               Exception ex =
                    new Exception(string.Format("{0} has overheated!", petName));
               ex.HelpLink = "http://www.CarsRUs.com";

               // Stuff in custom data regarding the error.
               ex.Data.Add("TimeStamp",
                    string.Format("The car exploded at {0}", DateTime.Now));
               ex.Data.Add("Cause", "You have a lead foot.");
               throw ex;
          }
          else
               Console.WriteLine("=> CurrSpeed = {0}", currSpeed);
     }
}
```

To successfully enumerate over the key/value pairs, you first must make sure to specify a `using` directive for the `System.Collection` namespace, given we will make use of a `DictionaryEntry` type in the file containing the class implementing your `Main()` method:

```
using System.Collections;
```

Next, we need to update the `catch` logic to test that the value returned from the `Data` property is not null (the default setting). After this point, we make use of the `Key` and `Value` properties of the `DictionaryEntry` type to print the custom user data to the console:

```
catch (Exception e)
{
...
     // By default, the data field is empty, so check for null.
     Console.WriteLine("\n-> Custom Data:");
     if (e.Data != null)
     {
          foreach (DictionaryEntry de in e.Data)
          Console.WriteLine("-> {0}: {1}", de.Key, de.Value);
     }
}
```

With this, we would now find the update shown in Figure 6-4.

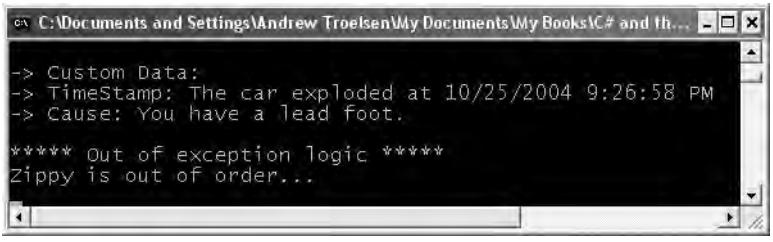

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and th...
-> Custom Data:
-> TimeStamp: The car exploded at 10/25/2004 9:26:58 PM
-> Cause: You have a lead foot.
***** Out of exception logic *****
Zippy is out of order...

Figure 6-4. *Obtaining custom user-defined data*

■ **Source Code** The SimpleException project is included under the Chapter 5 subdirectory.

System-Level Exceptions (System.SystemException)

The .NET base class libraries define many classes derived from `System.Exception`. For example, the `System` namespace defines core error objects such as `ArgumentOutOfRangeException`, `IndexOutOfRangeException`, `StackOverflowException`, and so forth. Other namespaces define exceptions that reflect the behavior of that namespace (e.g., `System.Drawing.Printing` defines printing exceptions, `System.IO` defines IO-based exceptions, `System.Data` defines database-centric exceptions, and so forth).

Exceptions that are thrown by the CLR are (appropriately) called *system exceptions*. These exceptions are regarded as nonrecoverable, fatal errors. System exceptions derive directly from a base class named `System.SystemException`, which in turn derives from `System.Exception` (which derives from `System.Object`):

```
public class SystemException : Exception
{
    //  Various constructors.
}
```

Given that the `System.SystemException` type does not add any additional functionality beyond a set of constructors, you might wonder why `SystemException` exists in the first place. Simply put, when an exception type derives from `System.SystemException`, you are able to determine that the .NET runtime is the entity that has thrown the exception, rather than the code base of the executing application.

Application-Level Exceptions (System.ApplicationException)

Given that all .NET exceptions are class types, you are free to create your own application-specific exceptions. However, due to the fact that the `System.SystemException` base class represents exceptions thrown from the CLR, you may naturally assume that you should derive your custom exceptions from the `System.Exception` type. While you could do so, best practice dictates that you instead derive from the `System.ApplicationException` type:

```
public class ApplicationException : Exception
{
    //  Various constructors.
```

Like SystemException, ApplicationException does not define any additional members beyond a set of constructors. Functionally, the only purpose of System.ApplicationException is to identify the source of the (nonfatal) error. When you handle an exception deriving from System.ApplicationException, you can assume the exception was raised by the code base of the executing application, rather than by the .NET base class libraries.

Building Custom Exceptions, Take One

While you can always throw instances of System.Exception to signal a runtime error (as shown in our first example), it is sometimes advantageous to build a *strongly typed exception* that represents the unique details of your current problem. For example, assume you wish to build a custom exception (named CarIsDeadException) to represent the error of speeding up a doomed automobile. The first step is to derive a new class from System.ApplicationException (by convention, all exception classes end with the "Exception" suffix).

```
// This custom exception describes the details of the car-is-dead condition.
public class CarIsDeadException : ApplicationException
{}
```

Like any class, you are free to include any number of custom members that can be called within the catch block of the calling logic. You are also free to override any virtual members defined by your parent classes. For example, we could implement CarIsDeadException by overriding the virtual Message property:

```
public class CarIsDeadException : ApplicationException
{
     private string messageDetails;

     public CarIsDeadException(){ }
     public CarIsDeadException(string message)
     {
          messageDetails = message;
     }

     // Override the Exception.Message property.
     public override string Message
     {
          get
          {
               return string.Format("Car Error Message: {0}", messageDetails);
          }
     }
}
```

Here, the CarIsDeadException type maintains a private data member (messageDetails) that represents data regarding the current exception, which can be set using a custom constructor. Throwing this error from the Accelerate() is straightforward. Simply allocate, configure, and throw a CarIsDeadException type rather than a generic System.Exception:

```
// Throw the custom CarIsDeadException.
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
...
     CarIsDeadException ex =
          new CarIsDeadException(string.Format("{0} has overheated!", petName));
     ex.HelpLink = "http://www.CarsRUs.com";
     ex.Data.Add("TimeStamp",
```

```
            string.Format("The car exploded at {0}", DateTime.Now));
        ex.Data.Add("Cause", "You have a lead foot.");
        throw ex;
...
}
```

To catch this incoming exception explicitly, your `catch` scope can now be updated to catch a specific `CarIsDeadException` type (however, given that `CarIsDeadException` "is-a" `System.Exception`, it is still permissible to catch a generic `System.Exception` as well):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    catch(CarIsDeadException e)
    {
        // Process incoming exception.
    }
...
}
```

So, now that you understand the basic process of building a custom exception, you may wonder when you are required to do so. Typically, you only need to create custom exceptions when the error is tightly bound to the class issuing the error (for example, a custom `File` class that throws a number of file-related errors, a `Car` class that throws a number of car-related errors, and so forth). In doing so, you provide the caller with the ability to handle numerous exceptions on an error-by-error basis.

Building Custom Exceptions, Take Two

The current `CarIsDeadException` type has overridden the `System.Exception.Message` property in order to configure a custom error message. However, we can simplify our programming tasks if we set the parent's `Message` property via an incoming constructor parameter. By doing so, we have no need to write anything other than the following:

```
public class CarIsDeadException : ApplicationException
{
    public CarIsDeadException(){ }
    public CarIsDeadException(string message)
        : base(message){ }
}
```

Notice that this time you have *not* defined a string variable to represent the message, and have *not* overridden the `Message` property. Rather, you are simply passing the parameter to your base class constructor. With this design, a custom exception class is little more than a uniquely named class deriving from `System.ApplicationException`, devoid of any member variables (or base class overrides).

Don't be surprised if most (if not all) of your custom exception classes follow this simple pattern. Many times, the role of a custom exception is not necessarily to provide additional functionality beyond what is inherited from the base classes, but to provide a *strongly named type* that clearly identifies the nature of the error.

Building Custom Exceptions, Take Three

If you wish to build a truly prim-and-proper custom exception class, you would want to make sure your type adheres to the exception-centric .NET best practices. Specifically, this requires that your custom exception:

- Derives from `Exception/ApplicationException`
- Is marked with the `[System.Serializable]` attribute
- Defines a default constructor
- Defines a constructor that sets the inherited `Message` property
- Defines a constructor to handle "inner exceptions"
- Defines a constructor to handle the serialization of your type

Now, based on your current background with .NET, you may have no idea regarding the role of attributes or object serialization, which is just fine. I'll address these topics at this point later in the text. However, to finalize our examination of building custom exceptions, here is the final iteration of `CarIsDeadException`:

```
[Serializable]
public class CarIsDeadException : ApplicationException
{
     public CarIsDeadException() { }
     public CarIsDeadException(string message) : base( message ) { }
     public CarIsDeadException(string message,
          System.Exception inner) : base( message, inner ) { }
     protected CarIsDeadException(
          System.Runtime.Serialization.SerializationInfo info,
          System.Runtime.Serialization.StreamingContext context)
               : base( info, context ) { }
}
```

Given that building custom exceptions that adhere to .NET best practices really only differ by their name, you will be happy to know that Visual Studio 2005 provides a code snippet template named "Exception" (see Figure 6-5), which will autogenerate a new exception class that adheres to .NET best practices (see Chapter 2 for an explanation of code snippet templates).

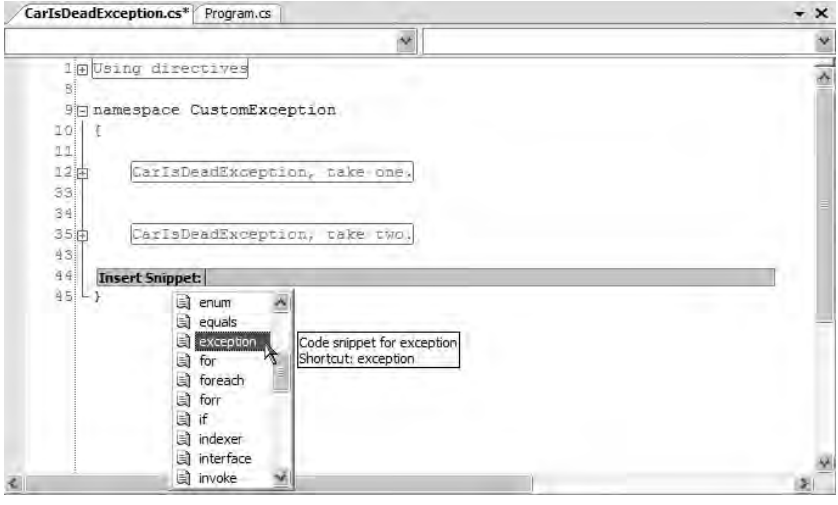


Figure 6-5. *The Exception code snippet template*

Processing Multiple Exceptions

In its simplest form, a `try` block has a single `catch` block. In reality, you often run into a situation where the statements within a `try` block could trigger *numerous* possible exceptions. For example, assume the car's `Accelerate()` method also throws a base-class-library predefined `ArgumentOutOfRangeException` if you pass an invalid parameter (which we will assume is any value less than zero):

```
// Test for invalid argument before proceeding.
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
     if(delta < 0)
         throw new ArgumentOutOfRangeException("Speed must be greater than zero!");
     ...
}
```

The `catch` logic could now specifically respond to each type of exception:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Here, we are on the lookout for multiple exceptions.
     try
     {
          for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
               myCar.Accelerate(10);
     }
     catch(CarIsDeadException e)
     {
          // Process CarIsDeadException.
     }
     catch(ArgumentOutOfRangeException e)
     {
          // Process ArgumentOutOfRangeException.
     }
...
}
```

When you are authoring multiple `catch` blocks, you must be aware that when an exception is thrown, it will be processed by the "first available" catch. To illustrate exactly what the "first available" catch means, assume you retrofitted the previous logic with an addition `catch` scope that attempts to handle all exceptions beyond `CarIsDeadException` and `ArgumentOutOfRangeException` by catching a generic `System.Exception` as follows:

```
// This code will not compile!
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     try
     {
          for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
               myCar.Accelerate(10);
     }
     catch(Exception e)
     {
          // Process all other exceptions?
     }
     catch(CarIsDeadException e)
     {
```

```
            // Process CarIsDeadException.
        }
        catch(ArgumentOutOfRangeException e)
        {
            // Process ArgumentOutOfRangeException.
        }
...
}
```

This exception handling logic generates compile-time errors. The problem is due to the fact that the first `catch` block can handle *anything* derived from `System.Exception` (given the "is-a" relationship), including the `CarIsDeadException` and `ArgumentOutOfRangeException` types. Therefore, the final two `catch` blocks are unreachable!

The rule of thumb to keep in mind is to make sure your `catch` blocks are structured such that the very first catch is the most specific exception (i.e., the most derived type in an exception type inheritance chain), leaving the final catch for the most general (i.e., the base class of a given exception inheritance chain, in this case `System.Exception`).

Thus, if you wish to define a `catch` statement that will handle any errors beyond `CarIsDeadException` and `ArgumentOutOfRangeException`, you would write the following:

```
// This code compiles just fine.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    try
    {
        for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
            myCar.Accelerate(10);
    }
    catch(CarIsDeadException e)
    {
        // Process CarIsDeadException.
    }
    catch(ArgumentOutOfRangeException e)
    {
        // Process ArgumentOutOfRangeException.
    }
    catch(Exception e)
    {
        // This will now handle all other possible exceptions
        // thrown from statements within the try scope.
    }
...
}
```

Generic catch Statements

C# also supports a "generic" `catch` scope that does not explicitly receive the exception object thrown by a given member:

```
// A generic catch.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    try
    {
```

```
            for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
                myCar.Accelerate(10);
        }
        catch
        {
            Console.WriteLine("Something bad happened...");
        }
...
}
```

Obviously, this is not the most informative way to handle exceptions, given that you have no way to obtain meaningful data about the error that occurred (such as the method name, call stack, or custom message). Nevertheless, C# does allow for such a construct.

Rethrowing Exceptions

Be aware that it is permissible for logic in a `try` block to *rethrow* an exception up the call stack to the previous caller. To do so, simply make use of the `throw` keyword within a `catch` block. This passes the exception up the chain of calling logic, which can be helpful if your `catch` block is only able to partially handle the error at hand:

```
// Passing the buck.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    try
    {
        // Speed up car logic...
    }
    catch(CarIsDeadException e)
    {
        // Do any partial processing of this error and pass the buck.
        // Here, we are rethrowing the incoming CarIsDeadException object.
        // However, you are also free to throw a different exception if need be.
        throw e;
    }
...
}
```

Be aware that in this example code, the ultimate receiver of `CarIsDeadException` is the CLR, given that it is the `Main()` method rethrowing the exception. Given this point, your end user is presenting with a system-supplied error dialog box. Typically, you would only rethrow a partial handled exception to a caller that has the ability to handle the incoming exception more gracefully.

Inner Exceptions

As you may suspect, it is entirely possible to trigger an exception at the time you are handling another exception. For example, assume that you are handing a `CarIsDeadException` within a particular `catch` scope, and during the process you attempt to record the stack trace to a file on your C drive named `carErrors.txt`:

```
catch(CarIsDeadException e)
{
    // Attempt to open a file named carErrors.txt on the C drive.
    FileStream fs = File.Open(@"C:\carErrors.txt", FileMode.Open);
    ...
}
```

Now, if the specified file is not located on your C drive, the call to `File.Open()` results in a `FileNotFoundException`! Later in this text, you will learn all about the `System.IO` namespace where you will discover how to programmatically determine if a file exists on the hard drive before attempting to open the file in the first place (thereby avoiding the exception altogether). However, to keep focused on the topic of exceptions, assume the exception has been raised.

When you encounter an exception while processing another exception, best practice states that you should record the new exception object as an "inner exception" within a new object of the same type as the initial exception (that was a mouthful). The reason we need to allocate a new object of the exception being handled is that the only way to document an inner exception is via a constructor parameter. Consider the following code:

```
catch (CarIsDeadException e)
{
     try
     {
          FileStream fs = File.Open(@"C:\carErrors.txt", FileMode.Open);
          ...
     }
     catch (Exception e2)
     {
          // Throw a exception that records the new exception,
          // as well as the message of the first exception.
          throw new CarIsDeadException(e.Message, e2);
     }
}
```

Notice in this case, we have passed in the `FileNotFoundException` object as the second parameter to the `CarIsDeadException` constructor. Once we have configured this new object, we throw it up the call stack to the next caller, which in this case would be the `Main()` method.

Given that there is no "next caller" after `Main()` to catch the exception, we would be again presented with an error dialog box. Much like the act of rethrowing an exception, recording inner exceptions is usually only useful when the caller has the ability to gracefully catch the exception in the first place. If this is the case, the caller's `catch` logic can make use of the `InnerException` property to extract the details of the inner exception object.

The Finally Block

A `try/catch` scope may also define an optional `finally` block. The motivation behind a `finally` block is to ensure that a set of code statements will *always* execute, exception (of any type) or not. To illustrate, assume you wish to always power down the car's radio before exiting `Main()`, regardless of any handled exception:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     Car myCar = new Car("Zippy", 20);
     myCar.CrankTunes(true);

     try
     {
          // Speed up car logic.
     }
     catch(CarIsDeadException e)
     {
          // Process CarIsDeadException.
     }
```

```
    catch(ArgumentOutOfRangeException e)
    {
        // Process ArgumentOutOfRangeException.
    }
    catch(Exception e)
    {
        // Process any other Exception.
    }
    finally
    {
        // This will always occur. Exception or not.
        myCar.CrankTunes(false);
    }
...
}
```

If you did not include a `finally` block, the radio would not be turned off if an exception is encountered (which may or may not be problematic). In a more real-world scenario, when you need to dispose of objects, close a file, detach from a database (or whatever), a `finally` block ensures a location for proper cleanup.

Who Is Throwing What?

Given that a method in the .NET Framework could throw any number of exceptions (under various circumstances), a logical question would be "How do I know which exceptions may be thrown by a given base class library method?" The ultimate answer is simple: Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation. Each method in the help system documents the exceptions a given member may throw. As a quick alternative, Visual Studio 2005 allows you to view the list of all exceptions thrown by a base class library member (if any) simply by hovering your mouse cursor over the member name in the code window (see Figure 6-6).

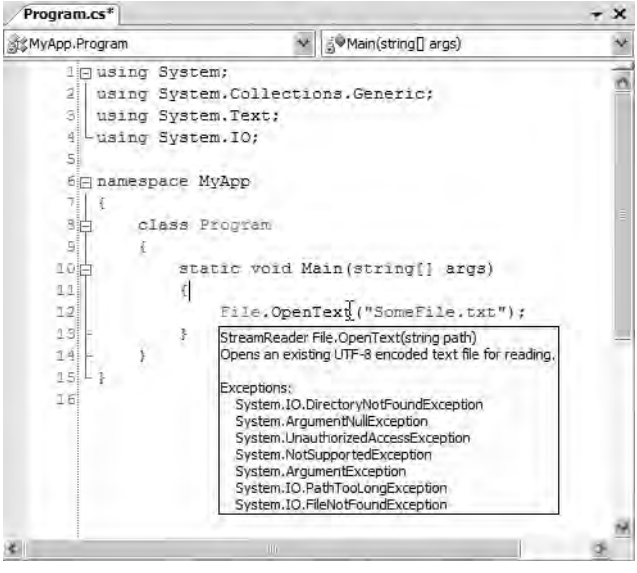


Figure 6-6. *Identifying the exceptions thrown from a given method*

For those coming to .NET from a Java background, understand that type members are *not* prototyped with the set of exceptions it may throw (in other words, .NET does not support typed exceptions). Given this, you are *not* required to handle each and every exception thrown from a given member. In many cases, you can handle all possible errors thrown from a set scope by catching a single `System.Exception`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     try
     {
          File.Open("IDontExist.txt", FileMode.Open);
     }
     catch(Exception ex)
     {
          Console.WriteLine(ex.Message);
     }
}
```

However, if you do wish to handle specific exceptions uniquely, just make use of multiple catch blocks as shown throughout this chapter.

The Result of Unhandled Exception

At this point, you might be wondering what would happen if you do not handle an exception thrown your direction. Assume that the logic in `Main()` increases the speed of the `Car` object beyond the maximum speed, without the benefit of `try/catch` logic. The result of ignoring an exception would be highly obstructive to the end user of your application, as an "unhandled exception" dialog box is displayed. On a machine where .NET debugging tools are installed, you would see something similar to Figure 6-7 (a nondevelopment machine would display a similar intrusive dialog box).

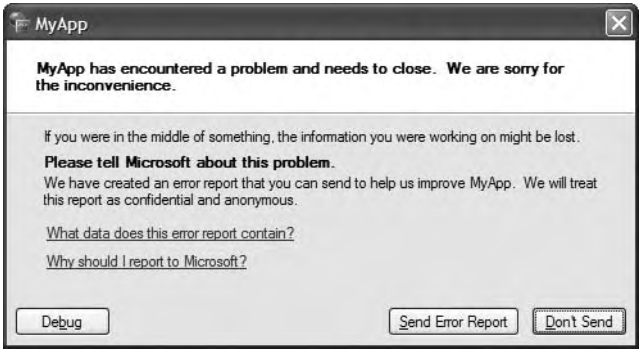

MyApp
MyApp has encountered a problem and needs to close. We are sorry for the inconvenience.
If you were in the middle of something, the information you were working on might be lost.
Please tell Microsoft about this problem.
We have created an error report that you can send to help us improve MyApp. We will treat this report as confidential and anonymous.
What data does this error report contain?
Why should I report to Microsoft?
Debug
Send Error Report
Don't Send

Figure 6-7. *The result of not dealing with exceptions*

■ **Source Code** The CustomException project is included under the Chapter 5 subdirectory.

Debugging Unhandled Exceptions Using Visual Studio 2005

To wrap things up, do be aware that Visual Studio 2005 provides a number of tools that help you debug unhandled custom exceptions. Again, assume you have increased the speed of a `Car` object beyond the maximum. If you were to start a debugging session (using the Debug ➤ Start menu selection), Visual Studio automatically breaks at the time the uncaught exception is thrown. Better yet, you are presented with a window (see Figure 6-8) displaying the value of the `Message` property.

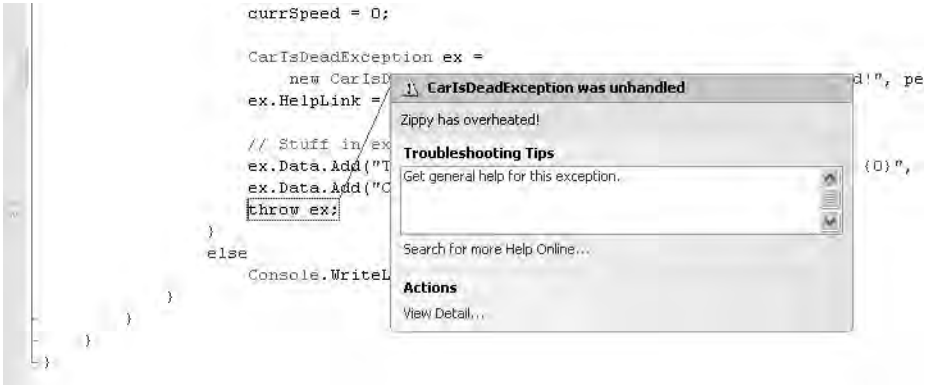


Figure 6-8. *Debugging unhandled custom exceptions with Visual Studio 2005*

If you click the View Detail link, you will find the details regarding the state of the object (see Figure 6-9).

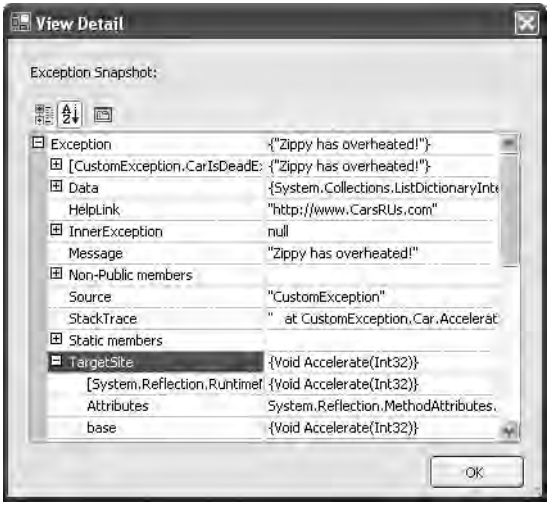


Figure 6-9. *Debugging unhandled custom exceptions with Visual Studio 2005*

■ **Note** If you fail to handle an exception thrown by a method in the .NET base class libraries, the Visual Studio 2005 debugger breaks at the statement that called the offending method.

Summary

In this chapter, you examined the role of structured exception handling. When a method needs to send an error object to the caller, it will allocate, configure, and throw a specific `System.Exception` derived type via the C# `throw` keyword. The caller is able to handle any possible incoming exceptions using the C# `catch` keyword and an optional `finally` scope.

When you are creating your own custom exceptions, you ultimately create a class type deriving from `System.ApplicationException`, which denotes an exception thrown from the currently executing application. In contrast, error objects deriving from `System.SystemException` represent critical (and fatal) errors thrown by the CLR. Last but not least, this chapter illustrated various tools within Visual Studio 2005 that can be used to create custom exceptions (according to .NET best practices) as well as debug exceptions.

CHAPTER 7

Interfaces and Collections

This chapter builds on your current understanding of object-oriented development by examining the topic of interface-based programming. Here you learn how to use C# to define and implement interfaces, and come to understand the benefits of building types that support "multiple behaviors." Along the way, a number of related topics are also discussed, such as obtaining interface references, explicit interface implementation, and the construction of interface hierarchies.

The remainder of this chapter is spent examining a number of interfaces defined within the .NET base class libraries. As you will see, your custom types are free to implement these predefined interfaces to support a number of advanced behaviors such as object cloning, object enumeration, and object sorting.

To showcase how interfaces are leveraged in the .NET base class libraries, this chapter will also examine numerous predefined interfaces implemented by various collection classes (`ArrayList`, `Stack`, etc.) defined by the `System.Collections` namespace. The information presented here will equip you to understand the topic of Chapter 10, .NET generics and the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace.

Defining Interfaces in C#

To begin this chapter, allow me to provide a formal definition of the "interface" type. An interface is nothing more than a named collection of semantically related *abstract members*. The specific members defined by an interface depend on the exact *behavior* it is modeling. Yes, it's true. An interface expresses a behavior that a given class or structure may choose to support.

At a syntactic level, an interface is defined using the C# `interface` keyword. Unlike other .NET types, interfaces never specify a base class (not even `System.Object`) and contain members that do *not* take an access modifier (as all interface members are implicitly public). To get the ball rolling, here is a custom interface defined in C#:

```
// This interface defines the behavior of "having points."
public interface IPointy
{
    // Implicitly public and abstract.
    byte GetNumberOfPoints();
}
```

Note By convention, interfaces in the .NET base class libraries are prefixed with a capital letter "I." When you are creating your own custom interfaces, it is considered a best practice to do the same.

As you can see, the IPointy interface defines a single method. However, .NET interface types are also able to define any number of properties. For example, you could create the IPointy interface to use a read-only property rather than a traditional accessor method:

```
// The pointy behavior as a read-only property.
public interface IPointy
{
     byte Points{get;}
}
```

Do understand that interface types are quite useless on their own, as they are nothing more than a named collection of abstract members. Given this, you cannot allocate interface types as you would a class or structure:

```
// Ack! Illegal to "new" interface types.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     IPointy p = new IPointy();  // Compiler error!
}
```

Interfaces do not bring much to the table until they are implemented by a class or structure. Here, IPointy is an interface that expresses the behavior of "having points." As you can tell, this behavior might be useful in the shapes hierarchy developed in Chapter 4. The idea is simple: Some classes in the Shapes hierarchy have points (such as the Hexagon), while others (such as the Circle) do not. If you configure Hexagon and Triangle to implement the IPointy interface, you can safely assume that each class now supports a common behavior, and therefore a common set of members.

Implementing an Interface in C#

When a class (or structure) chooses to extend its functionality by supporting interface types, it does so using a comma-delimited list in the type definition. Be aware that the direct base class must be the *first item* listed after the colon operator. When your class type derives directly from System.Object, you are free to simply list the interface(s) supported by the class, as the C# compiler will extend your types from System.Object if you do not say otherwise. On a related note, given that structures always derive from System.ValueType (see Chapter 3), simply list each interface directly after the structure definition. Ponder the following examples:

```
// This class derives from System.Object and
// implements a single interface.
public class SomeClass : ISomeInterface
{...}

// This class also derives from System.Object
// and implements a single interface.
public class MyClass : object, ISomeInterface
{...}

// This class derives from a custom base class
// and implements a single interface.
public class AnotherClass : MyBaseClass, ISomeInterface
{...}

// This struct derives from System.ValueType and
// implements two interfaces.
public struct SomeStruct : ISomeInterface, IPointy
{...}
```

Understand that implementing an interface is an all-or-nothing proposition. The supporting type is not able to selectively choose which members it will implement. Given that the `IPointy` interface defines a single property, this is not too much of a burden. However, if you are implementing an interface that defines ten members, the type is now responsible for fleshing out the details of the ten abstract entities.

In any case, here is the implementation of the updated shapes hierarchy (note the new `Triangle` class type):

```
// Hexagon now implements IPointy.
public class Hexagon : Shape, IPointy
{
     public Hexagon(){ }
     public Hexagon(string name) : base(name){ }
     public override void Draw()
     { Console.WriteLine("Drawing {0}  the Hexagon", PetName); }

     // IPointy Implementation.
     public byte Points
     {
          get { return 6; }
     }
}

// New Shape derived class named Triangle.
public class Triangle : Shape, IPointy
{
     public Triangle() { }
     public Triangle(string name) : base(name) { }
     public override void Draw()
     { Console.WriteLine("Drawing {0} the Triangle", PetName); }

     // IPointy Implementation.
     public byte Points
     {
          get { return 3; }
     }
}
```

Each class now returns its number of points to the caller when asked to do so. To sum up the story so far, the Visual Studio 2005 class diagram shown in Figure 7-1 illustrates `IPointy`-compatible classes using the popular "lollipop" notation.

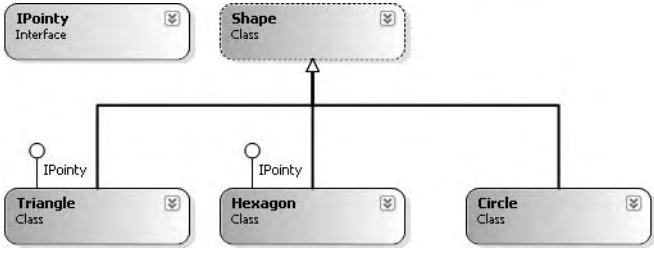


Figure 7-1. *The Shapes hierarchy (now with interfaces)*

Contrasting Interfaces to Abstract Base Classes

Given your work in Chapter 4, you may be wondering what the point of interface types are in the first place. After all, C# already allows you to build abstract class types containing abstract methods. Like an interface, when a class derives from an abstract base class, it is also under obligation to flesh out the details of the abstract methods (provided the derived class is not declared abstract as well). However, abstract base classes do far more than define a group of abstract methods. They are free to define public, private, and protected state data, as well as any number of concrete methods that can be accessed by the subclasses.

Interfaces, on the other hand, are pure protocol. Interfaces *never* define state data and *never* provide an implementation of the methods (if you try, you receive a compile-time error):

```
public interface IAmABadInterface
{
     // Error, interfaces can't define data!
     int myInt = 0;

     // Error, only abstract members allowed!
     void MyMethod()
     { Console.WriteLine("Eek!"); }
}
```

Interface types are also quite helpful given that C# (and .NET-aware languages in general) only support single inheritance; the interface-based protocol allows a given type to support numerous behaviors, while avoiding the issues that arise when deriving from extending multiple base classes.

Most importantly, interface-based programming provides yet another way to inject polymorphic behavior into a system. If multiple classes (or structures) implement the same interface in their unique ways, you have the power to treat each type in the same manner. As you will see a bit later in this chapter, interfaces are extremely polymorphic, given that types that are not related via classical inheritance can support identical behaviors.

Invoking Interface Members at the Object Level

Now that you have a set of types that support the `IPointy` interface, the next question is how you interact with the new functionality. The most straightforward way to interact with functionality supplied by a given interface is to invoke the methods directly from the object level. For example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Call new Points member defined by IPointy.
     Hexagon hex = new Hexagon();
     Console.WriteLine("Points: {0}", hex.Points);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

This approach works fine in this particular case, given that you are well aware that the `Hexagon` type has implemented the interface in question. Other times, however, you will not be able to determine at compile time which interfaces are supported by a given type. For example, assume you have an array containing 50 `Shape`-compatible types, only some of which support `IPointy`. Obviously, if you attempt to invoke the `Points` property on a type that has not implemented `IPointy`, you receive a compile-time error. Next question: How can we dynamically determine the set of interfaces supported by a type?

The first way you can determine at runtime if a type supports a specific interface is to make use of an explicit cast. If the type does not support the requested interface, you receive an `InvalidCastException`. To handle this possibility gracefully, make use of structured exception handling, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Catch a possible InvalidCastException.
     Circle c = new Circle("Lisa");
     IPointy itfPt;
     try
     {
          itfPt = (IPointy)c;
          Console.WriteLine(itfPt.Points);
     }
     catch (InvalidCastException e)
     { Console.WriteLine(e.Message); }
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

While you could make use of `try/catch` logic and hope for the best, it would be ideal to determine which interfaces are supported before invoking the interface members in the first place. Let's see two ways of doing so.

Obtaining Interface References: The as Keyword

The second way you can determine whether a given type supports an interface is to make use of the `as` keyword, which was first introduced in Chapter 4. If the object can be treated as the specified interface, you are returned a reference to the interface in question. If not, you receive a `null` reference:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Can we treat hex2 as IPointy?
     Hexagon hex2 = new Hexagon("Peter");
     IPointy itfPt2 = hex2 as IPointy;

     if(itfPt2 != null)
          Console.WriteLine("Points: {0}", itfPt2.Points);
     else
          Console.WriteLine("OOPS! Not pointy...");
}
```

Notice that when you make use of the `as` keyword, you have no need to make use of `try/catch` logic, given that if the reference is not null, you know you are calling on a valid interface reference.

Obtaining Interface References: The is Keyword

You may also check for an implemented interface using the `is` keyword. If the object in question is not compatible with the specified interface, you are returned the value `false`. On the other hand, if the type is compatible with the interface in question, you can safely call the members without needing to make use of `try/catch` logic.

To illustrate, assume we have updated the array of `Shape` types by including some members that implement `IPointy`. Notice how we are able to determine which item in the array supports this interface using the `is` keyword:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     Shape[] s = { new Hexagon(), new Circle(), new Triangle("Joe"),
               new Circle("JoJo")} ;
```

```
    for(int i = 0; i < s.Length; i++)
    {
        // Recall the Shape base class defines an abstract Draw()
        // member, so all shapes know how to draw themselves.
        s[i].Draw();

        // Who's pointy?
        if(s[i] is IPointy)
            Console.WriteLine("-> Points: {0} ", ((IPointy)s[i]).Points);
        else
            Console.WriteLine("-> {0}\'s not pointy!", s[i].PetName);
    }
}
```

The output follows in Figure 7-2.

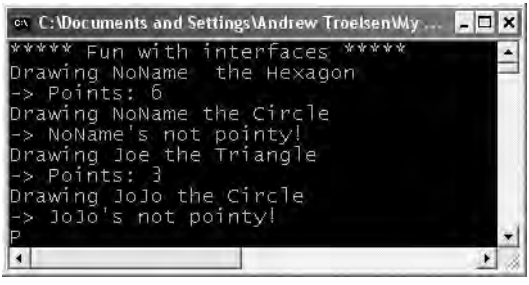


Figure 7-2. *Dynamically determining implemented interfaces*

Interfaces As Parameters

Given that interfaces are valid .NET types, you may construct methods that take interfaces as parameters. To illustrate, assume you have defined another interface named `IDraw3D`:

```
// Models the ability to render a type in stunning 3D.
public interface IDraw3D
{
    void Draw3D();
}
```

Next, assume that two of your three shapes (`Circle` and `Hexagon`) have been configured to support this new behavior:

```
// Circle supports IDraw3D.
public class Circle : Shape, IDraw3D
{
...
    public void Draw3D()
    {  Console.WriteLine("Drawing Circle in 3D!"); }
}

// Hexagon supports IPointy and IDraw3D.
public class Hexagon : Shape, IPointy, IDraw3D
{
...
```

```
    public void Draw3D()
    {  Console.WriteLine("Drawing Hexagon in 3D!"); }
}
```

Figure 7-3 presents the updated Visual Studio 2005 class diagram.

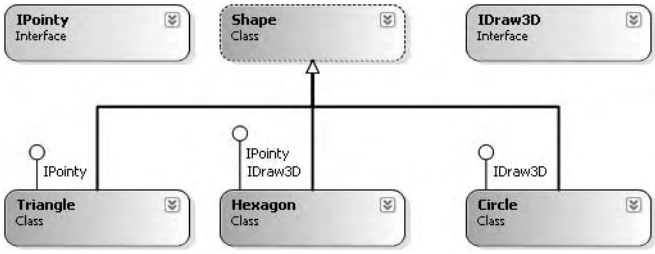


Figure 7-3. *The updated Shapes hierarchy*

If you now define a method taking an `IDraw3D` interface as a parameter, you are able to effectively send in *any* object implementing `IDraw3D` (if you attempt to pass in a type not supporting the necessary interface, you receive a compile-time error). Consider the following:

```
// Make some shapes. If they can be rendered in 3D, do it!
public class Program
{
    // I'll draw anyone supporting IDraw3D.
    public static void DrawIn3D(IDraw3D itf3d)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("-> Drawing IDraw3D compatible type");
        itf3d.Draw3D();
    }

    static void Main()
    {
        Shape[] s = { new Hexagon(), new Circle(),
                      new Triangle(), new Circle("JoJo")} ;

        for(int i = 0; i < s.Length; i++)
        {
            ...
            // Can I draw you in 3D?
            if(s[i] is IDraw3D)
                DrawIn3D((IDraw3D)s[i]);
        }
    }
}
```

Notice that the triangle is never drawn, as it is not `IDraw3D`-compatible (see Figure 7-4).

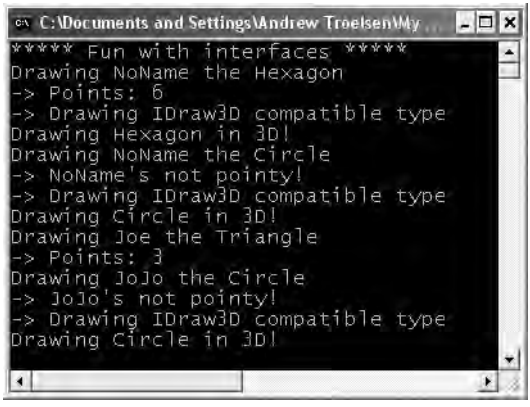

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My ...
***** Fun with interfaces *****
Drawing NoName the Hexagon
-> Points: 6
-> Drawing IDraw3D compatible type
Drawing Hexagon in 3D!
Drawing NoName the Circle
-> NoName's not pointy!
-> Drawing IDraw3D compatible type
Drawing Circle in 3D!
Drawing Joe the Triangle
-> Points: 3
Drawing JoJo the Circle
-> JoJo's not pointy!
-> Drawing IDraw3D compatible type
Drawing Circle in 3D!

Figure 7-4. *Interfaces as parameters*

Interfaces As Return Values

Interfaces can also be used as method return values. For example, you could write a method that takes any `System.Object`, checks for `IPointy` compatibility, and returns a reference to the extracted interface:

```
// This method tests for IPointy-compatibility and,
// if able, returns an interface reference.
static IPointy ExtractPointyness(object o)
{
     if (o is IPointy)
         return (IPointy)o;
     else
          return null;
}
```

We could interact with this method as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Attempt to get IPointy from Car object.
     Car myCar = new Car();
     IPointy itfPt = ExtractPointyness(myCar);

     if(itfPt != null)
          Console.WriteLine("Object has {0} points.", itfPt.Points);
     else
          Console.WriteLine("This object does not implement IPointy");
}
```

Arrays of Interface Types

Understand that the same interface can be implemented by numerous types, even if they are not within the same class hierarchy. This can yield some very powerful programming constructs. For example, assume that you have developed a brand new class hierarchy modeling kitchen utensils and another modeling gardening equipment.

Although these hierarchies are completely unrelated from a classical inheritance point of view, you can treat them polymorphically using interface-based programming. To illustrate, assume you have an array of IPointy-compatible objects. Given that these members all support the same interface, you are able to iterate through the array and treat each object as an IPointy-compatible object, regardless of the overall diversity of the class hierarchies:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // This array can only contain types that
     // implement the IPointy interface.
     IPointy[] myPointyObjects = {new Hexagon(), new Knife(),
          new Triangle(), new Fork(), new PitchFork()};

     for (int i = 0; i < myPointyObjects.Length; i++)
          Console.WriteLine("Object has {0} points.", myPointyObjects[i].Points);
}
```

■ **Note** Given the language-agonistic nature of .NET, understand that it is permissible to define an interface in one language (C#) and implement it in another (VB .NET). To understand how this is possible requires an understanding of .NET assemblies, which is the topic of Chapter 11.

Understanding Explicit Interface Implementation

In our current definition of IDraw3D, we were forced to name its sole method Draw3D() in order to avoid clashing with the abstract Draw() method defined in the Shape base class. While there is nothing horribly wrong with this interface definition, a more natural method name would simply be Draw():

```
// Refactor method name from "Draw3D" to "Draw".
public interface IDraw3D
{
     void Draw();
}
```

If we were to make such a change, this would require us to also update our implementation of DrawIn3D().

```
public static void DrawIn3D(IDraw3D itf3d)
{
     Console.WriteLine("-> Drawing IDraw3D compatible type");
     itf3d.Draw();
}
```

Now, assume you have defined a new class named Line that derives from the abstract Shape class and implements IDraw3D (both of which now define an identically named abstract Draw() method):

```
// Problems? It depends...
public class Line : Shape, IDraw3D
{
     public override void Draw()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing a line...");
     }
}
```

The Line class compiles without a hitch. But consider the following Main() logic:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Calls Draw().
     Line myLine = new Line();
     myLine.Draw();

     // Calls same implementation of Draw()!
     IDraw3D itfDraw3d= (IDraw3D) myLine;
     itfDraw3d.Draw();
}
```

Given what you already know about the Shape base class and IDraw3D interface, it looks as if you have called *two* variations of the Draw() method (one from the object level, the other from an interface reference). Nevertheless, the compiler is happy to call the same implementation from an interface or object reference, given that the Shape abstract base class and IDraw3D interface have an identically named member. This would be problematic if you would like to have the IDraw3D.Draw() method render a type in stunning 3D, while the overridden Shape.Draw() method draws in boring 2D.

Now consider a related problem. What if you wish to ensure that the methods defined by a given interface are only accessible from an interface reference rather than an object reference? Currently, the members defined by the IPointy interface can be accessed using either an object reference or an IPointy reference.

The answer to both questions comes by way of *explicit interface implementation*. Using this technique, you are able to ensure that the object user can only access methods defined by a given interface using the correct interface reference, as well as circumvent possible name clashes. To illustrate, here is the updated Line class (assume you have updated Hexagon and Circle in a similar manner):

```
// Using explicit method implementation we are able
// to provide distinct Draw() implementations.
public class Line : Shape, IDraw3D
{
     // You can only call this method from an IDraw3D interface reference.
     void IDraw3D.Draw()
     { Console.WriteLine("Drawing a 3D line..."); }

     // You can only call this at the object level.
     public override void Draw()
     {  Console.WriteLine("Drawing a line..."); }
}
```

As you can see, when explicitly implementing an interface member, the general pattern breaks down to *returnValue InterfaceName.MethodName*(*args*). There are a few odds and ends to be aware of when using explicit interface implementation. First and foremost, you cannot define the explicitly implemented members with an access modifier. For example, the following is illegal syntax:

```
// Nope! Illegal.
public class Line : Shape, IDraw3D
{
     public void IDraw3D.Draw()  // <= Error!
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Drawing a 3D line...");
     }
...
}
```

This should make sense. The whole reason to use explicit interface method implementation is to ensure that a given interface method is bound at the interface level. If you were to add the `public` keyword, this would suggest that the method is a member of the public sector of the class, which defeats the point! Given this design, the caller is only able to invoke the `Draw()` method defined by the `Shape` base class from the object level:

```
// This invokes the overridden Shape.Draw() method.
Line myLine = new Line();
myLine.Draw();
```

To invoke the `Draw()` method defined by `IDraw3D`, we must now explicitly obtain the interface reference using any of the techniques shown previously. For example:

```
// This triggers the IDraw3D.Draw() method.
Line myLine = new Line();
IDraw3D i3d = (IDraw3D)myLine;
i3d.Draw();
```

Resolving Name Clashes

Explicit interface implementation can also be very helpful whenever you are implementing a number of interfaces that happen to contain identical members. For example, assume you wish to create a class that implements all the following new interface types:

```
// Three interfaces each define identically named methods.
public interface IDraw
{
     void Draw();
}

public interface IDrawToPrinter
{
     void Draw();
}
```

If you wish to build a class named `SuperImage` that supports basic rendering (`IDraw`), 3D rendering (`IDraw3D`), as well as printing services (`IDrawToPrinter`), the only way to provide unique implementations for each method is to use explicit interface implementation:

```
// Not deriving from Shape, but still injecting a name clash.
public class SuperImage : IDraw, IDrawToPrinter, IDraw3D
{
     void IDraw.Draw()
     {  /* Basic drawing logic. */ }

     void IDrawToPrinter.Draw()
     {  /* Printer logic. */ }

     void IDraw3D.Draw()
     {  /* 3D rendering logic. */ }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The CustomInterface project is located under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

Building Interface Hierarchies

To continue our investigation of creating custom interfaces, let's examine the topic of *interface hierarchies*. Just as a class can serve as a base class to other classes (which can in turn function as base classes to yet another class), it is possible to build inheritance relationships among interfaces. As you might expect, the topmost interface defines a general behavior, while the most derived interface defines more specific behaviors. To illustrate, ponder the following interface hierarchy:

```
// The base interface.
public interface IDrawable
{  void Draw();}

public interface IPrintable : IDrawable
{  void Print(); }

public interface IMetaFileRender : IPrintable
{  void Render(); }
```

Figure 7-5 illustrates the chain of inheritance.

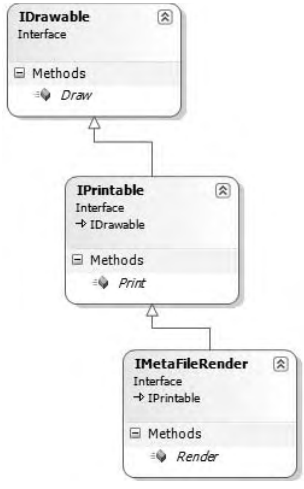


Figure 7-5. *An interface hierarchy*

Now, if a class wished to support each behavior expressed in this interface hierarchy, it would derive from the *nth-most* interface (`IMetaFileRender` in this case). Any methods defined by the base interface(s) are automatically carried into the definition. For example:

```
// This class supports IDrawable, IPrintable, and IMetaFileRender.
public class SuperImage : IMetaFileRender
{
     public void Draw()
     { Console.WriteLine("Basic drawing logic."); }

     public void Print()
     { Console.WriteLine("Draw to printer."); }

     public void Render()
     { Console.WriteLine("Render to metafile."); }
}
```

Here is some sample usage of exercising each interface from a `SuperImage` instance:

```
// Exercise the interfaces.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     SuperImage si = new SuperImage();

     // Get IDrawable.
     IDrawable itfDraw = (IDrawable)si;
     itfDraw.Draw();

     // Now get ImetaFileRender, which exposes all methods up
     // the chain of inheritance.
     if (itfDraw is IMetaFileRender)
     {
          IMetaFileRender itfMF = (IMetaFileRender)itfDraw;
          itfMF.Render();
          itfMF.Print();
     }
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Interfaces with Multiple Base Interfaces

As you build interface hierarchies, be aware that it is completely permissible to create an interface that derives from *multiple* base interfaces. Recall, however, that it is *not* permissible to build a class that derives from multiple base classes. To illustrate, assume you are building a new set of interfaces that model the automobile behaviors for a particular English agent:

```
public interface ICar
{  void Drive(); }

public interface IUnderwaterCar
{  void Dive(); }

// Here we have an interface with TWO base interfaces.
public interface IJamesBondCar : ICar, IUnderwaterCar
{  void TurboBoost(); }
```

Figure 7-6 illustrates the chain of inheritance.

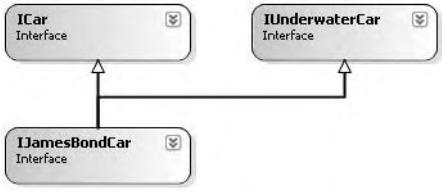


Figure 7-6. *Multiple inheritance of interface types is allowed by the CTS.*

If you were to build a class that implements `IJamesBondCar`, you would now be responsible for implementing `TurboBoost()`, `Dive()`, and `Drive()`:

```
public class JamesBondCar : IJamesBondCar
{
     public void Drive(){ Console.WriteLine("Speeding up...");}
     public void Dive(){ Console.WriteLine("Submerging...");}
     public void TurboBoost(){ Console.WriteLine("Blast off!");}
}
```

This specialized automobile can now be manipulated as you would expect:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     JamesBondCar j = new JamesBondCar();
     j.Drive();
     j.TurboBoost();
     j.Dive();
}
```

Implementing Interfaces Using Visual Studio 2005

Although interface-based programming is a very powerful programming technique, implementing interfaces may entail a healthy amount of typing. Given that interfaces are a named set of abstract members, you will be required to type in the stub code (and implementation) for *each* interface method on *each* class that supports the behavior.

As you would hope, Visual Studio 2005 does support various tools that make the task of implementing interfaces less burdensome. Assume you wish to implement the `ICar` interface on a new class named `MiniVan`. You will notice when you complete typing the interface's name (or when you position the mouse cursor on the interface name in the code window), the first letter is underlined (formally termed a "smart tag"). If you click the smart tag, you will be presented a drop-down list that allows you to implement the interface explicitly or implicitly (see Figure 7-7).

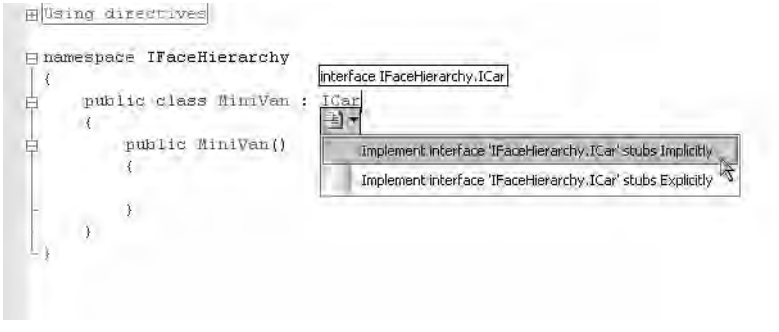


Figure 7-7. *Implementing interfaces using Visual Studio 2005*

Once you select options, you will see that Visual Studio 2005 has built generated stub code (within a named code region) for you to update (note that the default implementation throws a `System.Exception`).

```
namespace IFaceHierarchy
{
    public class MiniVan : ICar
    {
```

```
        public MiniVan()
        {
        }

        #region ICar Members
        public void Drive()
        {
           new Exception("The method or operation is not implemented.");
        }
        #endregion
    }
}
```

Now that you have drilled into the specifics of building and implementing custom interfaces, the remainder of the chapter examines a number of predefined interfaces contained within the .NET base class libraries.

■ **Source Code** The IFaceHierarchy project is located under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

Building Enumerable Types (IEnumerable and IEnumerator)

To illustrate the process of implementing existing .NET interfaces, let's first examine the role of `IEnumerable` and `IEnumerator`. Assume you have developed a class named `Garage` that contains a set of individual `Car` types (see Chapter 6) stored within a `System.Array`:

```
// Garage contains a set of Car objects.
public class Garage
{
     private Car[] carArray;

     // Fill with some Car objects upon startup.
     public Garage()
     {
          carArray = new Car[4];
          carArray[0] = new Car("Rusty", 30);
          carArray[1] = new Car("Clunker", 55);
          carArray[2] = new Car("Zippy", 30);
          carArray[3] = new Car("Fred", 30);
     }
}
```

Ideally, it would be convenient to iterate over the `Garage` object's subitems using the C# `foreach` construct:

```
// This seems reasonable...
public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Garage carLot = new Garage();

          // Hand over each car in the collection?
          foreach (Car c in carLot)
          {
```

```
            Console.WriteLine("{0} is going {1} MPH",
                c.PetName, c.CurrSpeed);
        }
    }
}
```

Sadly, the compiler informs you that the `Garage` class does not implement a method named `GetEnumerator()`. This method is formalized by the `IEnumerable` interface, which is found lurking within the `System.Collections` namespace. Objects that support this behavior advertise that they are able to expose contained subitems to the caller:

```
// This interface informs the caller
// that the object's subitems can be enumerated.
public interface IEnumerable
{
    IEnumerator GetEnumerator();
}
```

As you can see, the `GetEnumerator()` method returns a reference to yet another interface named `System.Collections.IEnumerator`. This interface provides the infrastructure to allow the caller to traverse the internal objects contained by the `IEnumerable`-compatible container:

```
// This interface allows the caller to
// obtain a container's subitems.
public interface IEnumerator
{
    bool MoveNext ();           // Advance the internal position of the cursor.
    object Current { get;}      // Get the current item (read-only property).
    void Reset ();              // Reset the cursor before the first member.
}
```

If you wish to update the `Garage` type to support these interfaces, you could take the long road and implement each method manually. While you are certainly free to provide customized versions of `GetEnumerator()`, `MoveNext()`, `Current`, and `Reset()`, there is a simpler way. As the `System.Array` type (as well as many other types) already implements `IEnumerable` and `IEnumerator`, you can simply delegate the request to the `System.Array` as follows:

```
using System.Collections;
...
public class Garage : IEnumerable
{
    // System.Array already implements IEnumerator!
    private Car[] carArray;

    public Cars()
    {
        carArray = new Car[4];
        carArray[0] = new Car("FeeFee", 200, 0);
        carArray[1] = new Car("Clunker", 90, 0);
        carArray[2] = new Car("Zippy", 30, 0);
        carArray[3] = new Car("Fred", 30, 0);
    }

    public IEnumerator GetEnumerator()
    {
        // Return the array object's IEnumerator.
        return carArray.GetEnumerator();
    }
}
```

Once you have updated your Garage type, you can now safely use the type within the C# foreach construct. Furthermore, given that the GetEnumerator() method has been defined publicly, the object user could also interact with the IEnumerator type:

```
// Manually work with IEnumerator.
IEnumerator i = carLot.GetEnumerator();
i.MoveNext();
Car myCar = (Car)i.Current;
Console.WriteLine("{0} is going {1} MPH", myCar.PetName, myCar.CurrSpeed);
```

If you would prefer to hide the functionality of IEnumerable from the object level, simply make use of explicit interface implementation:

```
public IEnumerator IEnumerable.GetEnumerator()
{
    // Return the array object's IEnumerator.
    return carArray.GetEnumerator();
}
```

■ **Source Code** The CustomEnumerator project is located under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

Understanding C# Iterator Methods

Under .NET 1.x, if you wished to have your custom collections (such as Garage) support foreach like enumeration, implementing the IEnumerable interface (and possibly the IEnumerator interface) was mandatory. However, C# 2005 offers an alternative way to build types that work with the foreach loop via *iterators*.

Simply put, an iterator is a member that specifies how a container's internal items should be returned when processed by foreach. While the iterator method must still be named GetEnumerator(), and the return value must still be of type IEnumerator, your custom class does *not* need to implement any of the expected interfaces:

```
public class Garage  // No longer implementing IEnumerator!
{
    private Car[] carArray;
    ...
    // Iterator method.
    public IEnumerator GetEnumerator()
    {
        foreach (Car c in carArray)
        {
            yield return c;
        }
    }
}
```

Notice that this implementation of GetEnumerator() iterates over the subitems using internal foreach logic and returns each Car to the caller using the new yield return syntax. The yield keyword is used to specify the value (or values) to be returned to the caller's foreach construct. When the yield return statement is reached, the current location is stored, and execution is restarted from this location the next time the iterator is called.

When the C# compiler encounters an iterator method, it will dynamically generate a nested class within the scope of the defining type (Garage in this case). This autogenerated class implements the IEnumerable and IEnumerator interfaces on our behalf and fleshes out the details of the GetEnumerator(), MoveNext(), Reset(), and Current members. If you were to load the current application

into ildasm.exe, you would find that the Garage's implementation of GetEnumerator() is making use of this compiler-generated type (which happens to be named <GetEnumerator>d__0 in this example) internally:

```
.method public hidebysig instance class
    [mscorlib]System.Collections.IEnumerator
    GetEnumerator() cil managed
{
...
  newobj instance void
    CustomEnumeratorWithYield.Garage/'<GetEnumerator>d__0'::.ctor(int32)
  ...
} // end of method Garage::GetEnumerator
```

Now, understand that because our current Garage type originally implemented GetEnumerator() by delegating to the internal System.Array, we would not really gain much by defining an iterator method as shown here. However, if you are building a more exotic custom container (such as a binary tree) where you need to manually implement the IEnumerator and IEnumerable interfaces, the C# iterator syntax can be a massive time-saver. In any case, the caller's code is identical when interacting with a type's iterator method via foreach:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Iterator Methods *****\n");
    Garage carLot = new Garage();
    foreach (Car c in carLot)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("{0} is going {1} MPH", c.PetName, c.CurrSpeed);
    }
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

■ **Source Code** The CustomEnumeratorWithYield project is located under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

Building Cloneable Objects (ICloneable)

As you recall from Chapter 3, System.Object defines a member named MemberwiseClone(). This method is used to obtain a *shallow copy* of the current object. Object users do not call this method directly (as it is protected); however, a given object may call this method itself during the *cloning* process. To illustrate, assume you have a class named Point:

```
// A class named Point.
public class Point
{
     // Public for easy access.
     public int x, y;
     public Point(int x, int y) { this.x = x; this.y = y;}
     public Point(){}

     // Override Object.ToString().
     public override string ToString()
     {  return string.Format("X = {0}; Y = {1}", x, y ); }
}
```

Given what you already know about reference types and value types (Chapter 3), you are aware that if you assign one reference variable to another, you have two references pointing to the same object in memory. Thus, the following assignment operation results in two references to the same `Point` object on the heap; modifications using either reference affect the same object on the heap:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Two references to same object!
     Point p1 = new Point(50, 50);
     Point p2 = p1;
     p2.x = 0;
     Console.WriteLine(p1);
     Console.WriteLine(p2);
}
```

When you wish to equip your custom types to support the ability to return an identical copy of itself to the caller, you may implement the standard `ICloneable` interface. This type defines a single method named `Clone()`:

```
public interface ICloneable
{
     object Clone();
}
```

Obviously, the implementation of the `Clone()` method varies between objects. However, the basic functionality tends to be the same: Copy the values of your member variables into a new object instance, and return it to the user. To illustrate, ponder the following update to the `Point` class:

```
// The Point now supports "clone-ability."
public class Point : ICloneable
{
     public int x, y;
     public Point(){ }
     public Point(int x, int y) { this.x = x; this.y = y;}

     // Return a copy of the current object.
     public object Clone()
     {  return new Point(this.x, this.y); }

     public override string ToString()
     {  return string.Format("X = {0}; Y = {1}", x, y ); }
}
```

In this way, you can create exact stand-alone copies of the `Point` type, as illustrated by the following code:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Notice Clone() returns a generic object type.
     // You must perform an explicit cast to obtain the derived type.
     Point p3 = new Point(100, 100);
     Point p4 = (Point)p3.Clone();

     // Change p4.x (which will not change p3.x).
     p4.x = 0;

     // Print each object.
     Console.WriteLine(p3);
     Console.WriteLine(p4);
}
```

While the current implementation of `Point` fits the bill, you can streamline things just a bit. Because the `Point` type does not contain reference type variables, you could simplify the implementation of the `Clone()` method as follows:

```
public object Clone()
{
    // Copy each field of the Point member by member.
    return this.MemberwiseClone();
}
```

Be aware, however, that if the `Point` did contain any reference type member variables, `MemberwiseClone()` will copy the references to those objects (aka a *shallow copy*). If you wish to support a true deep copy, you will need to create a new instance of any reference type variables during the cloning process. Let's see an example.

A More Elaborate Cloning Example

Now assume the `Point` class contains a reference type member variable of type `PointDescription`. This class maintains a point's friendly name as well as an identification number expressed as a `System.Guid` (if you don't come from a COM background, know that a Globally Unique Identifier [GUID] is a statistically unique 128-bit number). Here is the implementation:

```
// This class describes a point.
public class PointDescription
{
     // Exposed publicly for simplicity.
     public string petName;
     public Guid pointID;

     public PointDescription()
     {
          this.petName = "No-name";
          pointID = Guid.NewGuid();
     }
}
```

The initial updates to the `Point` class itself included modifying `ToString()` to account for these new bits of state data, as well as defining and creating the `PointDescription` reference type. To allow the outside world to establish a pet name for the `Point`, you also update the arguments passed into the overloaded constructor:

```
public class Point : ICloneable
{
     public int x, y;
     public PointDescription desc = new PointDescription();

     public Point(){}
     public Point(int x, int y)
     {
          this.x = x; this.y = y;
     }
     public Point(int x, int y, string petname)
     {
          this.x = x;
          this.y = y;
          desc.petName = petname;
     }
```

```
    public object Clone()
    { return this.MemberwiseClone(); }

    public override string ToString()
    {
        return string.Format("X = {0}; Y = {1}; Name = {2};\nID = {3}\n",
            x, y, desc.petName, desc.pointID);
    }
}
```

Notice that you did not yet update your `Clone()` method. Therefore, when the object user asks for a clone using the current implementation, a shallow (member-by-member) copy is achieved. To illustrate, assume you have updated `Main()` as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("Cloned p3 and stored new Point in p4");
    Point p3 = new Point(100, 100, "Jane");
    Point p4 = (Point)p3.Clone();

    Console.WriteLine("Before modification:");
    Console.WriteLine("p3: {0}", p3);
    Console.WriteLine("p4: {0}", p4);
    p4.desc.petName = "Mr. X";
    p4.x = 9;

    Console.WriteLine("\nChanged p4.desc.petName and p4.x");
    Console.WriteLine("After modification:");
    Console.WriteLine("p3: {0}", p3);
    Console.WriteLine("p4: {0}", p4);
}
```

Figure 7-8 shows the output.

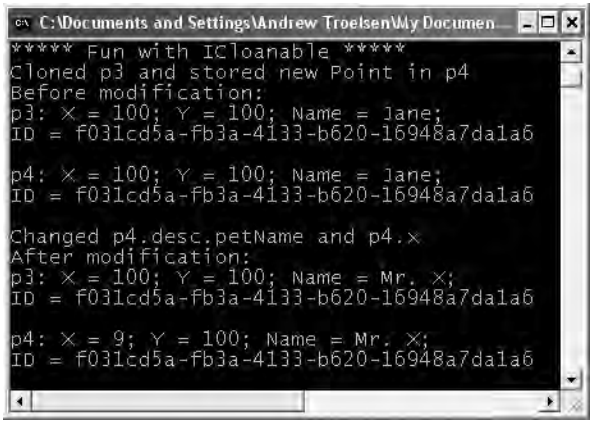

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documen
***** Fun with ICloanable *****
Cloned p3 and stored new Point in p4
Before modification:
p3: X = 100; Y = 100; Name = Jane;
ID = f031cd5a-fb3a-4133-b620-16948a7da1a6
p4: X = 100; Y = 100; Name = Jane;
ID = f031cd5a-fb3a-4133-b620-16948a7da1a6
Changed p4.desc.petName and p4.x
After modification:
p3: X = 100; Y = 100; Name = Mr. X;
ID = f031cd5a-fb3a-4133-b620-16948a7da1a6
p4: X = 9; Y = 100; Name = Mr. X;
ID = f031cd5a-fb3a-4133-b620-16948a7da1a6

Figure 7-8. `MemberwiseClone()` *returns a shallow copy of the current object.*

In order for your `Clone()` method to make a complete deep copy of the internal reference types, you need to configure the object returned by `MemberwiseClone()` to account for the current point's name (the `System.Guid` type is in fact a structure, so the numerical data is indeed copied). Here is one possible implementation:

```
// Now we need to adjust for the PointDescription member.
public object Clone()
{
     Point newPoint = (Point)this.MemberwiseClone();
     PointDescription currentDesc = new PointDescription();
     currentDesc.petName = this.desc.petName;
     newPoint.desc = currentDesc;
     return newPoint;
}
```

If you rerun the application once again as shown in Figure 7-9, you see that the `Point` returned from `Clone()` does copy its internal reference type member variables (note the pet name is now unique for both `p3` and `p4`).

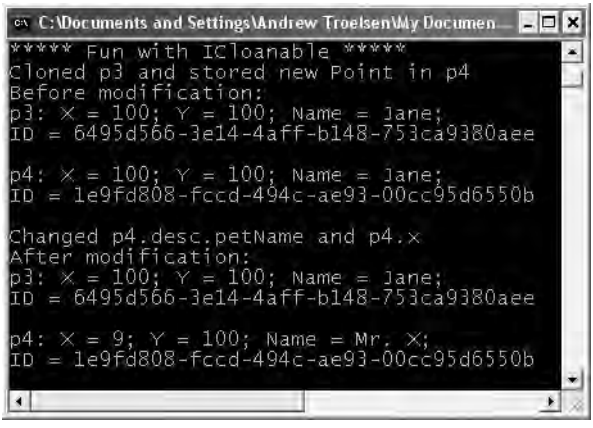

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documen...
***** Fun with ICloanable *****
Cloned p3 and stored new Point in p4
Before modification:
p3: X = 100; Y = 100; Name = Jane;
ID = 6495d566-3e14-4aff-b148-753ca9380aee
p4: X = 100; Y = 100; Name = Jane;
ID = 1e9fd808-fccd-494c-ae93-00cc95d6550b
Changed p4.desc.petName and p4.x
After modification:
p3: X = 100; Y = 100; Name = Jane;
ID = 6495d566-3e14-4aff-b148-753ca9380aee
p4: X = 9; Y = 100; Name = Mr. X;
ID = 1e9fd808-fccd-494c-ae93-00cc95d6550b

Figure 7-9. *Now you have a true deep copy of the object.*

To summarize the cloning process, if you have a class or structure that contains nothing but value types, implement your `Clone()` method using `MemberwiseClone()`. However, if you have a custom type that maintains other reference types, you need to establish a new type that takes into account each reference type member variable.

■ **Source Code** The CloneablePoint project is located under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

Building Comparable Objects (IComparable)

The `System.IComparable` interface specifies a behavior that allows an object to be sorted based on some specified key. Here is the formal definition:

```
// This interface allows an object to specify its
// relationship between other like objects.
public interface IComparable
```

```
{
     int CompareTo(object o);
}
```

Let's assume you have updated the `Car` class to maintain an internal ID number (represented by a simple integer named `carID`) that can be set via a constructor parameter and manipulated using a new property named `ID`. Here are the relevant updates to the `Car` type:

```
public class Car
{
...
     private int carID;
     public int ID
     {
          get { return carID; }
          set { carID = value; }
     }
     public Car(string name, int currSp, int id)
     {
           currSpeed = currSp;
           petName = name;
           carID = id;
     }
...
}
```

Object users might create an array of `Car` types as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Make an array of Car types.
    Car[] myAutos = new Car[5];
    myAutos[0] = new Car("Rusty", 80, 1);
    myAutos[1] = new Car("Mary", 40, 234);
    myAutos[2] = new Car("Viper", 40, 34);
    myAutos[3] = new Car("Mel", 40, 4);
    myAutos[4] = new Car("Chucky", 40, 5);
}
```

As you recall, the `System.Array` class defines a static method named `Sort()`. When you invoke this method on an array of intrinsic types (`int`, `short`, `string`, etc.), you are able to sort the items in the array in numerical/alphabetic order as these intrinsic data types implement `IComparable`. However, what if you were to send an array of `Car` types into the `Sort()` method as follows?

```
// Sort my cars?
Array.Sort(myAutos);
```

If you run this test, you would find that an `ArgumentException` exception is thrown by the runtime, with the following message: "At least one object must implement IComparable." When you build custom types, you can implement `IComparable` to allow arrays of your types to be sorted. When you flesh out the details of `CompareTo()`, it will be up to you to decide what the baseline of the ordering operation will be. For the `Car` type, the internal `carID` seems to be the most logical candidate:

```
// The iteration of the Car can be ordered
// based on the CarID.
public class Car : IComparable
{
...
     // IComparable implementation.
     int IComparable.CompareTo(object obj)
```

```
    {
        Car temp = (Car)obj;
        if(this.carID > temp.carID)
            return 1;
        if(this.carID < temp.carID)
            return -1;
        else
            return 0;
    }
}
```

As you can see, the logic behind `CompareTo()` is to test the incoming type against the current instance based on a specific point of data. The return value of `CompareTo()` is used to discover if this type is less than, greater than, or equal to the object it is being compared with (see Table 7-1).

Table 7-1. `CompareTo()` *Return Values*

`CompareTo()` **Return Value**	**Meaning in Life**
Any number less than zero	This instance comes before the specified object in the sort order.
Zero	This instance is equal to the specified object.
Any number greater than zero	This instance comes after the specified object in the sort order.

Now that your `Car` type understands how to compare itself to like objects, you can write the following user code:

```
// Exercise the IComparable interface.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Make an array of Car types.
...
    // Dump current array.
    Console.WriteLine("Here is the unordered set of cars:");
    foreach(Car c in myAutos)
        Console.WriteLine("{0} {1}", c.ID, c.PetName);

    // Now, sort them using IComparable!
    Array.Sort(myAutos);

    // Dump sorted array.
    Console.WriteLine("Here is the ordered set of cars:");
    foreach(Car c in myAutos)
        Console.WriteLine("{0} {1}", c.ID, c.PetName);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Figure 7-10 illustrates a test run.

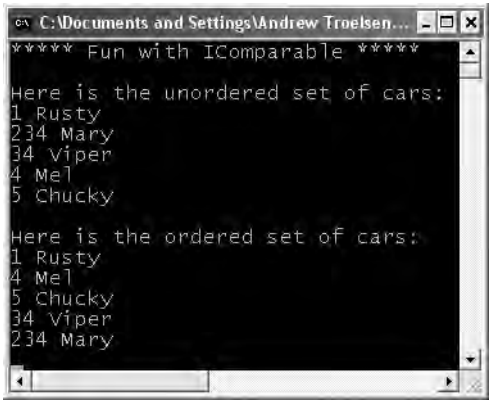


Figure 7-10. *Comparing automobiles based on car ID*

Specifying Multiple Sort Orders (IComparer)

In this version of the `Car` type, you made use of the car's ID to function as the baseline of the sort order. Another design might have used the pet name of the car as the basis of the sorting algorithm (to list cars alphabetically). Now, what if you wanted to build a `Car` that could be sorted by ID *as well as* by pet name? If this is the behavior you are interested in, you need to make friends with another standard interface named `IComparer`, defined within the `System.Collections` namespace as follows:

```
// A generic way to compare two objects.
interface IComparer
{
     int Compare(object o1, object o2);
}
```

Unlike the `IComparable` interface, `IComparer` is typically *not* implemented on the type you are trying to sort (i.e., the `Car`). Rather, you implement this interface on any number of helper classes, one for each sort order (pet name, car ID, etc.). Currently, the `Car` type already knows how to compare itself against other cars based on the internal car ID. Therefore, to allow the object user to sort an array of `Car` types by pet name will require an additional helper class that implements `IComparer`. Here's the code:

```
// This helper class is used to sort an array of Cars by pet name.
using System.Collections;

public class PetNameComparer : IComparer
{
     public PetNameComparer(){ }

     // Test the pet name of each object.
     int IComparer.Compare(object o1, object o2)
     {
          Car t1 = (Car)o1;
          Car t2 = (Car)o2;
          return String.Compare(t1.PetName, t2.PetName);
     }
}
```

The object user code is able to make use of this helper class. `System.Array` has a number of overloaded `Sort()` methods, one that just happens to take an object implementing `IComparer` (see Figure 7-11):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Now sort by pet name.
     Array.Sort(myAutos, new PetNameComparer());

     // Dump sorted array.
     Console.WriteLine("Ordering by pet name:");
     foreach(Car c in myAutos)
          Console.WriteLine("{0} {1}", c.ID, c.PetName);
...
}
```

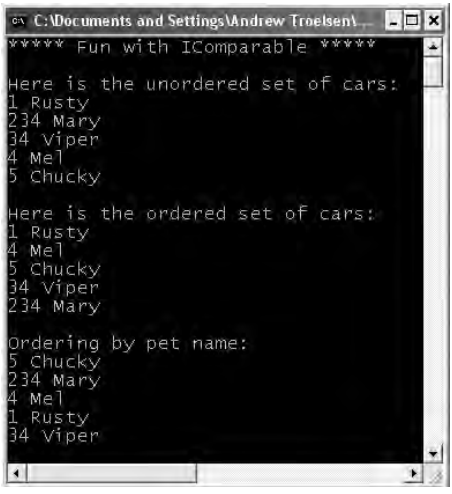


Figure 7-11. *Sorting automobiles by pet name*

Custom Properties, Custom Sort Types

It is worth pointing out that you can make use of a custom static property in order to help the object user along when sorting your `Car` types by a specific data point. Assume the `Car` class has added a static read-only property named `SortByPetName()` that returns an instance of an object implementing the `IComparer` interface (`PetNameComparer`, in this case):

```
// We now support a custom property to return
// the correct IComparer interface.
public class Car : IComparable
{
     ...
     // Property to return the SortByPetName comparer.
     public static IComparer SortByPetName
     {  get {  return (IComparer)new PetNameComparer(); }  }
}
```

The object user code can now sort by pet name using a strongly associated property, rather than just "having to know" to use the stand-alone `PetNameComparer` class type:

```
// Sorting by pet name made a bit cleaner.
Array.Sort(myAutos, Car.SortByPetName);
```

■ **Source Code** The ComparableCar project is located under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

Hopefully at this point, you not only understand how to define and implement interface types, but can understand their usefulness. To be sure, interfaces will be found within every major .NET namespace. To wrap up this chapter, let's check out the interfaces (and core classes) of the `System.Collections` namespace.

The Interfaces of the System.Collections Namespace

The most primitive container construct would have to be our good friend `System.Array`. As you have already seen in Chapter 3, this class provides a number of services (e.g., reversing, sorting, clearing, and enumerating). However, the simple `Array` class has a number of limitations, most notably it does not dynamically resize itself as you add or clear items. When you need to contain types in a more flexible container, you may wish to leverage the types defined within the `System.Collections` namespace (or as discussed in Chapter 10, the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace).

The `System.Collections` namespace defines a number of interfaces (some of which you have already implemented during the course of this chapter). As you can guess, a majority of the collection classes implement these interfaces to provide access to their contents. Table 7-2 gives a breakdown of the core collection-centric interfaces.

Table 7-2. *Interfaces of* `System.Collections`

`System.Collections` **Interface**	**Meaning in Life**
`ICollection`	Defines generic characteristics (e.g., count and thread safety) for a collection type.
`IComparer`	Allows two objects to be compared.
`IDictionary`	Allows an object to represent its contents using name/value pairs.
`IDictionaryEnumerator`	Enumerates the contents of a type supporting `IDictionary`.
`IEnumerable`	Returns the `IEnumerator` interface for a given object.
`IEnumerator`	Generally supports `foreach`-style iteration of subtypes.
`IHashCodeProvider`	Returns the hash code for the implementing type using a customized hash algorithm.
`IKeyComparer`	(This interface is new to .NET 2.0.) Combines the functionality of `IComparer` and `IHashCodeProvider` to allow objects to be compared in a "hash-code-compatible manner" (e.g., if the objects are indeed equal, they must also return the same hash code value).
`IList`	Provides behavior to add, remove, and index items in a list of objects. Also, this interface defines members to determine whether the implementing collection type is read-only and/or a fixed-size container.

Many of these interfaces are related by an interface hierarchy, while others are stand-alone entities. Figure 7-12 illustrates the relationship between each type (recall that it is permissible for a single interface to derive from multiple interfaces).

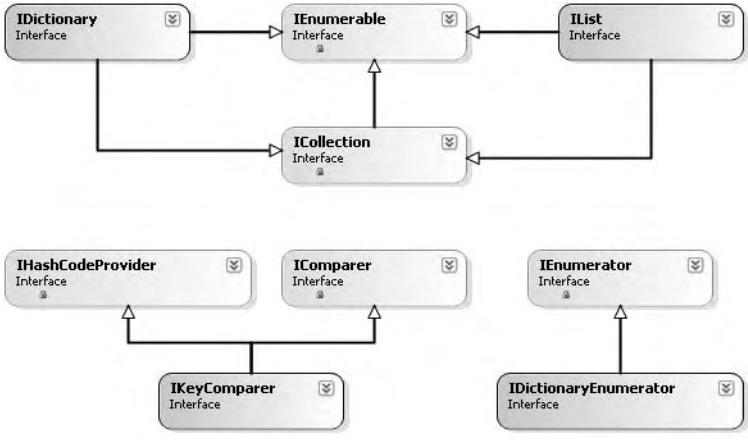


Figure 7-12. *The* `System.Collections` *interface hierarchy*

The Role of ICollection

The `ICollection` interface is the most primitive interface of the `System.Collections` namespace in that it defines a behavior supported by a collection type. In a nutshell, this interface provides a small set of properties that allow you to determine (a) the number of items in the container, (b) the thread safety of the container, as well as (c) the ability to copy the contents into a `System.Array` type. Formally, `ICollection` is defined as follows (note that `ICollection` extends `IEnumerable`):

```
public interface ICollection : IEnumerable
{
     // IEnumerable member...
     int Count { get; }
     bool IsSynchronized { get; }
     object SyncRoot { get; }
     void CopyTo(Array array, int index);
}
```

The Role of IDictionary

As you may already be aware, a *dictionary* is simply a collection that maintains a set of name/value pairs. For example, you could build a custom type that implements `IDictionary` such that you can store `Car` types (the values) that may be retrieved by ID or pet name (e.g., names). Given this functionality, you can see that the `IDictionary` interface defines a `Keys` and `Values` property as well as `Add()`, `Remove()`, and `Contains()` methods. The individual items may be obtained by the type indexer. Here is the formal definition:

```
public interface IDictionary :
     ICollection, IEnumerable
{
```

```
    bool IsFixedSize { get; }
    bool IsReadOnly { get; }
    object this[ object key ] { get; set; }
    ICollection Keys { get; }
    ICollection Values { get; }
    void Add(object key, object value);
    void Clear();
    bool Contains(object key);
    IDictionaryEnumerator GetEnumerator();
    void Remove(object key);
}
```

The Role of IDictionaryEnumerator

If you were paying attention, you may have noted that `IDictionary.GetEnumerator()` returns an instance of the `IDictionaryEnumerator` type. `IDictionaryEnumerator` is simply a strongly typed enumerator, given that it extends `IEnumerator` by adding the following functionality:

```
public interface IDictionaryEnumerator : IEnumerator
{
    // IEnumerator methods...
    DictionaryEntry Entry { get; }
    object Key { get; }
    object Value { get; }
}
```

Notice how `IDictionaryEnumerator` allows you to enumerate over items in the dictionary via the generic `Entry` property, which returns a `System.Collections.DictionaryEntry` class type. In addition, you are also able to traverse the name/value pairs using the `Key`/`Value` properties.

The Role of IList

The final key interface of `System.Collections` is `IList`, which provides the ability to insert, remove, and index items into (or out of) a container:

```
public interface IList :
    ICollection, IEnumerable
{
    bool IsFixedSize { get; }
    bool IsReadOnly { get; }
    object this[ int index ] { get; set; }
    int Add(object value);
    void Clear();
    bool Contains(object value);
    int IndexOf(object value);
    void Insert(int index, object value);
    void Remove(object value);
    void RemoveAt(int index);
}
```

The Class Types of System.Collections

As I hope you understand by this point in the chapter, interfaces by themselves are not very useful until they are implemented by a given class or structure. Table 7-3 provides a rundown of the core classes in the `System.Collections` namespace and the key interfaces they support.

Table 7-3. *Classes of* `System.Collections`

`System.Collections` Class	Meaning in Life	Key Implemented Interfaces
`ArrayList`	Represents a dynamically sized array of objects.	`IList`, `ICollection`, `IEnumerable`, and `ICloneable`
`Hashtable`	Represents a collection of objects identified by a numerical key. Custom types stored in a `Hashtable` should always override `System.Object.GetHashCode()`.	`IDictionary`, `ICollection`, `IEnumerable`, and `ICloneable`
`Queue`	Represents a standard first-in, first-out (FIFO) queue.	`ICollection`, `ICloneable`, and `IEnumerable`
`SortedList`	Like a dictionary; however, the elements can also be accessed by ordinal position (e.g., index).	`IDictionary`, `ICollection`, `IEnumerable`, and `ICloneable`
`Stack`	A last-in, first-out (LIFO) queue providing push and pop (and peek) functionality.	`ICollection`, `ICloneable`, and `IEnumerable`

In addition to these key types, `System.Collections` defines some minor players (at least in terms of their day-to-day usefulness) such as `BitArray`, `CaseInsensitiveComparer`, and `CaseInsensitiveHashCodeProvider`. Furthermore, this namespace also defines a small set of abstract base classes (`CollectionBase`, `ReadOnlyCollectionBase`, and `DictionaryBase`) that can be used to build strongly typed containers.

As you begin to experiment with the `System.Collections` types, you will find they all tend to share common functionality (that's the point of interface-based programming). Thus, rather than listing out the members of each and every collection class, the next task of this chapter is to illustrate how to interact with three common collection types: `ArrayList`, `Queue`, and `Stack`. Once you understand the functionality of these types, gaining an understanding of the remaining collection classes should naturally follow (especially since each of the types is fully documented within online help).

Working with the ArrayList Type

The `ArrayList` type is bound to be your most frequently used type in the `System.Collections` namespace in that it allows you to dynamically resize the contents at your whim. To illustrate the basics of this type, ponder the following code, which leverages the `ArrayList` to manipulate a set of `Car` objects:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Create ArrayList and fill with some initial values.
     ArrayList carArList = new ArrayList();
     carArList.AddRange(new Car[] { new Car("Fred", 90, 10),
          new Car("Mary", 100, 50), new Car("MB", 190, 11)});
     Console.WriteLine("Items in carArList: {0}", carArList.Count);

     // Print out current values.
     foreach(Car c in carArList)
          Console.WriteLine("Car pet name: {0}", c.PetName);

     // Insert a new item.
     Console.WriteLine("\n->Inserting new Car.");
     carArList.Insert(2, new Car("TheNewCar", 0, 12));
     Console.WriteLine("Items in carArList: {0}", carArList.Count);
```

```
    // Get object array from ArrayList and print again.
    object[] arrayOfCars = carArList.ToArray();
    for(int i = 0; i < arrayOfCars.Length; i++)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Car pet name: {0}",
            ((Car)arrayOfCars[i]).PetName);
    }
}
```

Here you are making use of the `AddRange()` method to populate your `ArrayList` with a set of `Car` types (as you can tell, this is basically a shorthand notation for calling `Add()` *n* number of times). Once you print out the number of items in the collection (as well as enumerate over each item to obtain the pet name), you invoke `Insert()`. As you can see, `Insert()` allows you to plug a new item into the `ArrayList` at a specified index. Finally, notice the call to the `ToArray()` method, which returns a generic array of `System.Object` types based on the contents of the original `ArrayList`. Figure 7-13 shows the output.

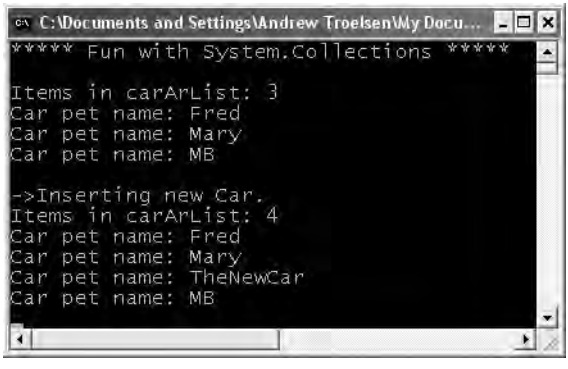

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Docu...
***** Fun with System.Collections *****
Items in carArList: 3
Car pet name: Fred
Car pet name: Mary
Car pet name: MB
->Inserting new Car.
Items in carArList: 4
Car pet name: Fred
Car pet name: Mary
Car pet name: TheNewCar
Car pet name: MB

Figure 7-13. *Fun with* `System.Collections.ArrayList`

Working with the Queue Type

Queues are containers that ensure items are accessed using a first-in, first-out manner. Sadly, we humans are subject to queues all day long: lines at the bank, lines at the movie theater, and lines at the morning coffeehouse. When you are modeling a scenario in which items are handled on a first-come, first-served basis, `System.Collections.Queue` is your type of choice. In addition to the functionality provided by the supported interfaces, `Queue` defines the key members shown in Table 7-4.

Table 7-4. *Members of the* `Queue` *Type*

Member of `System.Collection.Queue`	**Meaning in Life**
`Dequeue()`	Removes and returns the object at the beginning of the `Queue`
`Enqueue()`	Adds an object to the end of the `Queue`
`Peek()`	Returns the object at the beginning of the `Queue` without removing it

To illustrate these methods, we will leverage our automobile theme once again and build a Queue object that simulates a line of cars waiting to enter a car wash. First, assume the following static helper method:

```
public static void WashCar(Car c)
{
     Console.WriteLine("Cleaning {0}", c.PetName);
}
```

Now, ponder the following code:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Make a Q with three items.
     Queue carWashQ = new Queue();
     carWashQ.Enqueue(new Car("FirstCar", 0, 1));
     carWashQ.Enqueue(new Car("SecondCar", 0, 2));
     carWashQ.Enqueue(new Car("ThirdCar", 0, 3));

     // Peek at first car in Q.
     Console.WriteLine("First in Q is {0}",
          ((Car)carWashQ.Peek()).PetName);

     // Remove each item from Q.
     WashCar((Car)carWashQ.Dequeue());
     WashCar((Car)carWashQ.Dequeue());
     WashCar((Car)carWashQ.Dequeue());

     // Try to de-Q again?
     try
     { WashCar((Car)carWashQ.Dequeue()); }
     catch(Exception e)
     { Console.WriteLine("Error!! {0}", e.Message);}
}
```

Here, you insert three items into the Queue type via its Enqueue() method. The call to Peek() allows you to view (but not remove) the first item currently in the Queue, which in this case is the car named FirstCar. Finally, the call to Dequeue() removes the item from the line and sends it into the WashCar() helper function for processing. Do note that if you attempt to remove items from an empty queue, a runtime exception is thrown.

Working with the Stack Type

The System.Collections.Stack type represents a collection that maintains items using a last-in, first-out manner. As you would expect, Stack defines a member named Push() and Pop() (to place items onto or remove items from the stack). The following stack example makes use of the standard System.String:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     Stack stringStack = new Stack();
     stringStack.Push("One");
     stringStack.Push("Two");
     stringStack.Push("Three");
```

```
      // Now look at the top item, pop it, and look again.
      Console.WriteLine("Top item is: {0}", stringStack.Peek());
      Console.WriteLine("Popped off {0}", stringStack.Pop());
      Console.WriteLine("Top item is: {0}", stringStack.Peek());
      Console.WriteLine("Popped off {0}", stringStack.Pop());
      Console.WriteLine("Top item is: {0}", stringStack.Peek());
      Console.WriteLine("Popped off {0}", stringStack.Pop());

      try
      {
           Console.WriteLine("Top item is: {0}", stringStack.Peek());
           Console.WriteLine("Popped off {0}", stringStack.Pop());
      }
      catch(Exception e)
      { Console.WriteLine("Error!! {0}", e.Message);}
}
```

Here, you build a stack that contains three string types (named according to their order of insertion). As you peek onto the stack, you will always see the item at the very top, and therefore the first call to `Peek()` reveals the third string. After a series of `Pop()` and `Peek()` calls, the stack is eventually empty, at which time additional `Peek()`/`Pop()` calls raise a system exception.

■ **Source Code** The CollectionTypes project can be found under the Chapter 7 subdirectory.

System.Collections.Specialized Namespace

In addition to the types defined within the `System.Collections` namespace, you should also be aware that the .NET base class libraries provide the `System.Collections.Specialized` namespace, which defines another set of types that are more (pardon the redundancy) specialized. For example, the `StringDictionary` and `ListDictionary` types each provide a stylized implementation of the `IDictionary` interface. Table 7-5 documents the key class types.

Table 7-5. *Types of the* `System.Collections.Specialized` *Namespace*

Member of `System.Collections.Specialized`	**Meaning in Life**
`CollectionsUtil`	Creates collections that ignore the case in strings.
`HybridDictionary`	Implements `IDictionary` by using a `ListDictionary` while the collection is small, and then switching to a `Hashtable` when the collection gets large.
`ListDictionary`	Implements `IDictionary` using a singly linked list. Recommended for collections that typically contain ten items or fewer.
`NameValueCollection`	Represents a sorted collection of associated `String` keys and `String` values that can be accessed either with the key or with the index.
`StringCollection`	Represents a collection of strings.
`StringDictionary`	Implements a hashtable with the key strongly typed to be a string rather than an object.
`StringEnumerator`	Supports a simple iteration over a `StringCollection`.

Summary

An interface can be defined as a named collection of *abstract members*. Because an interface does not provide any implementation details, it is common to regard an interface as a behavior that may be supported by a given type. When two or more classes implement the same interface, you are able to treat each type the same way (aka interface-based polymorphism).

C# provides the `interface` keyword to allow you to define a new interface. As you have seen, a type can support as many interfaces as necessary using a comma-delimited list. Furthermore, it is permissible to build interfaces that derive from multiple base interfaces.

In addition to building your custom interfaces, the .NET libraries define a number of standard (i.e., framework-supplied) interfaces. As you have seen, you are free to build custom types that implement these predefined interfaces to gain a number of desirable traits such as cloning, sorting, and enumerating. Finally, you spent some time investigating the stock collection classes defined within the `System.Collections` namespace and examining a number of common interfaces used by the collection-centric types.

CHAPTER 8

Callback Interfaces, Delegates, and Events

Up to this point in the text, every application you have developed added various bits of code to `Main()`, which, in some way or another, sent requests to a given object. However, you have not yet examined how an object can talk back to the entity that created it. In most programs, it is quite common for objects in a system to engage in a two-way conversation through the use of callback interfaces, events, and other programming constructs. To set the stage, this chapter begins by examining how interface types may be used to enable callback functionality.

Next, you learn about the .NET delegate type, which is a type-safe object that "points to" other method(s) that can be invoked at a later time. Unlike a traditional C++ function pointer, however, .NET delegates are objects that have built-in support for multicasting and asynchronous method invocation. We will examine the asynchronous behavior of delegate types later in this text during our examination of the `System.Threading` namespace (see Chapter 14).

Once you learn how to create and manipulate delegate types, you then investigate the C# `event` keyword, which simplifies and streamlines the process of working with delegate types. Finally, this chapter examines new delegate-and-event-centric language features of C#, including anonymous methods and method group conversions. As you will see, these techniques are shorthand notations for capturing the target of a given event.

Understanding Callback Interfaces

As you have seen in the previous chapter, interfaces define a behavior that may be supported by various types in your system. Beyond using interfaces to establish polymorphism, interfaces may also be used as a *callback mechanism*. This technique enables objects to engage in a two-way conversation using a common set of members.

To illustrate the use of callback interfaces, let's update the now familiar `Car` type in such a way that it is able to inform the caller when it is about to explode (the current speed is 10 miles below the maximum speed) and has exploded (the current speed is at or above the maximum speed). The ability to send and receive these events will be facilitated with a custom interface named `IEngineEvents`:

```
// The callback interface.
public interface IEngineEvents
{
    void AboutToBlow(string msg);
    void Exploded(string msg);
}
```

Event interfaces are not typically implemented directly by the object directly interested in receiving the events, but rather by a helper object called a *sink object*. The sender of the events (the `Car` type in this case) will make calls on the sink under the appropriate circumstances. Assume the sink class is called `CarEventSink`, which simply prints out the incoming messages to the console. Beyond this point, our sink will also maintain a string that identifies its friendly name:

```
// Car event sink.
public class CarEventSink : IEngineEvents
{
     private string name;
     public CarEventSink(){}
     public CarEventSink(string sinkName)
     { name = sinkName; }

     public void AboutToBlow(string msg)
     { Console.WriteLine("{0} reporting: {1}", name, msg); }
     public void Exploded(string msg)
     { Console.WriteLine("{0} reporting: {1}", name, msg); }
}
```

Now that you have a sink object that implements the event interface, your next task is to pass a reference to this sink into the `Car` type. The `Car` holds onto the reference and makes calls back on the sink when appropriate. In order to allow the `Car` to obtain a reference to the sink, we will need to add a public helper member to the `Car` type that we will call `Advise()`. Likewise, if the caller wishes to detach from the event source, it may call another helper method on the `Car` type named `Unadvise()`. Finally, in order to allow the caller to register multiple event sinks (for the purposes of multicasting), the `Car` now maintains an `ArrayList` to represent each outstanding connection:

```
// This Car and caller can now communicate
// using the IEngineEvents interface.
public class Car
{
     // The set of connected sinks.
     ArrayList clientSinks = new ArrayList();

     // Attach or disconnect from the source of events.
     public void Advise(IEngineEvents sink)
     {  clientSinks.Add(sink); }

     public void Unadvise(IEngineEvents sink)
     {  clientSinks.Remove(sink); }
...
}
```

To actually send the events, let's update the `Car.Accelerate()` method to iterate over the list of connections maintained by the `ArrayList` and fire the correct notification when appropriate (note the `Car` class now maintains a `Boolean` member variable named `carIsDead` to represent the engine's state):

```
// Interface-based event protocol!
class Car
{
...
     // Is the car alive or dead?
     bool carIsDead;

     public void Accelerate(int delta)
     {
```

```
        // If the car is 'dead', send Exploded event to each sink.
        if(carIsDead)
        {
            foreach(IEngineEvents e in clientSinks)
                e.Exploded("Sorry, this car is dead...");
        }
        else
        {
            currSpeed += delta;

            // Send AboutToBlow event.
            if(10 == maxSpeed - currSpeed)
            {
                foreach(IEngineEvents e in clientSinks)
                    e.AboutToBlow("Careful buddy!  Gonna blow!");
            }

            if(currSpeed >= maxSpeed)
                carIsDead = true;
            else
                Console.WriteLine("\tCurrSpeed = {0} ", currSpeed);
        }
}
```

Here is some client-side code, now making use of a callback interface to listen to the `Car` events:

```
// Make a car and listen to the events.
public class CarApp
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Interfaces as event enablers *****");
        Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

        // Make sink object.
        CarEventSink sink = new CarEventSink();

        // Pass the Car a reference to the sink.
        c1.Advise(sink);

        // Speed up (this will trigger the events).
        for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
            c1.Accelerate(20);

        // Detach from event source.
        c1.Unadvise(sink);
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Figure 8-1 shows the end result of this interface-based event protocol.

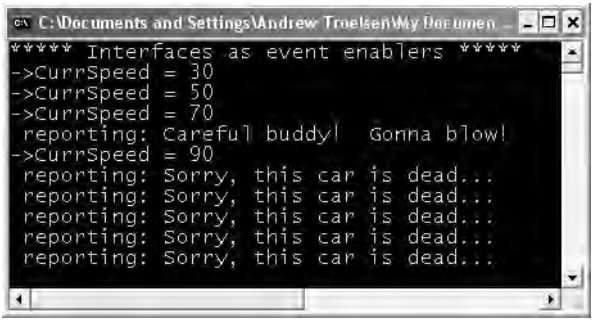

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documen
***** Interfaces as event enablers *****
->CurrSpeed = 30
->CurrSpeed = 50
->CurrSpeed = 70
reporting: Careful buddy! Gonna blow!
->CurrSpeed = 90
reporting: Sorry, this car is dead...
reporting: Sorry, this car is dead...
reporting: Sorry, this car is dead...
reporting: Sorry, this car is dead...
reporting: Sorry, this car is dead...

Figure 8-1. *An interface-based event protocol*

Do note that the `Unadvise()` method can be very helpful in that it allows the caller to selectively detach from an event source at will. Here, you call `Unadvise()` before exiting `Main()`, although this is not technically necessary. However, assume that the application now wishes to register two sinks, dynamically remove a particular sink during the flow of execution, and continue processing the program at large:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Interfaces as event enablers *****");
     Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

     // Make 2 sink objects.
     Console.WriteLine("***** Creating sinks *****");
     CarEventSink sink = new CarEventSink("First sink");
     CarEventSink myOtherSink = new CarEventSink("Other sink");

     // Hand sinks to Car.
     Console.WriteLine("\n***** Sending 2 sinks into Car *****");
     c1.Advise(sink);
     c1.Advise(myOtherSink);

     // Speed up (this will generate the events).
     Console.WriteLine("\n***** Speeding up *****");
     for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
          c1.Accelerate(20);

     // Detach first sink from events.
     Console.WriteLine("\n***** Removing first sink *****");
     c1.Unadvise(sink);

     // Speed up again (only myOtherSink will be called).
     Console.WriteLine("\n***** Speeding up again *****");
     for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
           c1.Accelerate(20);

     // Detach other sink from events.
     Console.WriteLine("\n***** Removing second sink *****");
     c1.Unadvise(myOtherSink);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Event interfaces can be helpful in that they can be used under any language or platform (.NET, J2EE, or otherwise) that supports interface-based programming. However, as you may be suspecting, the .NET platform defines an "official" event protocol. To understand this intrinsic event architecture, we begin by examining the role of the delegate type.

■ **Source Code** The EventInterface project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Understanding the .NET Delegate Type

Before formally defining .NET delegates, let's gain a bit of perspective. Historically speaking, the Windows API makes frequent use of C-style function pointers to create entities termed *callback functions* or simply *callbacks*. Using callbacks, programmers were able to configure one function to report back to (call back) another function in the application.

The problem with standard C-style callback functions is that they represent little more than a raw address in memory. Ideally, callbacks could be configured to include additional type-safe information such as the number of (and types of) parameters and the return value (if any) of the method pointed to. Sadly, this is not the case in traditional callback functions, and, as you may suspect, can therefore be a frequent source of bugs, hard crashes, and other runtime disasters.

Nevertheless, callbacks are useful entities. In the .NET Framework, callbacks are still possible, and their functionality is accomplished in a much safer and more object-oriented manner using *delegates*. In essence, a delegate is a type-safe object that points to another method (or possibly multiple methods) in the application, which can be invoked at a later time. Specifically speaking, a delegate type maintains three important pieces of information:

- The *name* of the method on which it makes calls
- The *arguments* (if any) of this method
- The *return value* (if any) of this method

■ **Note** Unlike C(++) function pointers, .NET delegates can point to either static or instance methods.

Once a delegate has been created and provided the aforementioned information, it may dynamically invoke the method(s) it points to at runtime. As you will see, every delegate in the .NET Framework (including your custom delegates) is automatically endowed with the ability to call their methods *synchronously* or *asynchronously*. This fact greatly simplifies programming tasks, given that we can call a method on a secondary thread of execution without manually creating and managing a `Thread` object. We will examine the asynchronous behavior of delegate types during our investigation of the `System.Threading` namespace in Chapter 14.

Defining a Delegate in C#

When you want to create a delegate in C#, you make use of the `delegate` keyword. The name of your delegate can be whatever you desire. However, you must define the delegate to match the signature of the method it will point to. For example, assume you wish to build a delegate named `BinaryOp` that can point to any method that returns an integer and takes two integers as input parameters:

```
// This delegate can point to any method,
// taking two integers and returning an
// integer.
public delegate int BinaryOp(int x, int y);
```

When the C# compiler processes delegate types, it automatically generates a sealed class deriving from `System.MulticastDelegate`. This class (in conjunction with its base class, `System.Delegate`) provides the necessary infrastructure for the delegate to hold onto the list of methods to be invoked at a later time. For example, if you examine the `BinaryOp` delegate using `ildasm.exe`, you would find the items shown in Figure 8-2.



Figure 8-2. *The C#* `delegate` *keyword represents a sealed type deriving from* `System.MulticastDelegate`.

As you can see, the generated `BinaryOp` class defines three public methods. `Invoke()` is perhaps the core method, as it is used to invoke each method maintained by the delegate type in a *synchronous* manner, meaning the caller must wait for the call to complete before continuing on its way. Strangely enough, the synchronous `Invoke()` method is *not* directly callable from C#. As you will see in just a bit, `Invoke()` is called behind the scenes when you make use of the appropriate C# syntax.

`BeginInvoke()` and `EndInvoke()` provide the ability to call the current method *asynchronously* on a second thread of execution. If you have a background in multithreading, you are aware that one of the most common reason developers create secondary threads of execution is to invoke methods that require time to complete. Although the .NET base class libraries provide an entire namespace devoted to multithreaded programming (`System.Threading`), delegates provide this functionality out of the box.

Now, how exactly does the compiler know how to define the `Invoke()`, `BeginInvoke()`, and `EndInvoke()` methods? To understand the process, here is the crux of the generated `BinaryOp` class type (**bold** marks the items specified by the defined delegate type):

```
sealed class BinaryOp : System.MulticastDelegate
{
     public BinaryOp(object target, uint functionAddress);
     public void Invoke(int x, int y);
     public IAsyncResult BeginInvoke(int x, int y,
          AsyncCallback cb, object state);
     public int EndInvoke(IAsyncResult result);
}
```

First, notice that the parameters and return value defined for the `Invoke()` method exactly match the definition of the `BinaryOp` delegate. The initial parameters to `BeginInvoke()` members (two integers in our case) are also based on the `BinaryOp` delegate; however, `BeginInvoke()` will always provide two final parameters (of type `AsyncCallback` and `object`) that are used to facilitate asynchronous method invocations. Finally, the return value of `EndInvoke()` is identical to the original delegate declaration and will always take as a sole parameter an object implementing the `IAsyncResult` interface.

Let's see another example. Assume you have defined a delegate type that can point to any method returning a string and receiving three `System.Boolean` input parameters:

```
public delegate string MyDelegate(bool a, bool b, bool c);
```

This time, the auto-generated class breaks down as follows:

```
sealed class MyDelegate : System.MulticastDelegate
{
     public MyDelegate(object target, uint functionAddress);
     public string Invoke(bool a, bool b, bool c);
     public IAsyncResult BeginInvoke(bool a, bool b, bool c,
          AsyncCallback cb, object state);
     public string EndInvoke(IAsyncResult result);
}
```

Delegates can also "point to" methods that contain any number of `out` or `ref` parameters. For example, assume the following delegate type:

```
public delegate string MyOtherDelegate(out bool a, ref bool b, int c);
```

The signatures of the `Invoke()` and `BeginInvoke()` methods look as you would expect; however, check out the `EndInvoke()` method, which now includes the set of all `out`/`ref` arguments defined by the delegate type:

```
sealed class MyOtherDelegate : System.MulticastDelegate
{
     public MyOtherDelegate (object target, uint functionAddress);
     public string Invoke(out bool a, ref bool b, int c);
     public IAsyncResult BeginInvoke(out bool a, ref bool b, int c,
          AsyncCallback cb, object state);
     public string EndInvoke(out bool a, ref bool b, IAsyncResult result);
}
```

To summarize, a C# delegate definition results in a sealed class with three compiler-generated methods whose parameter and return types are based on the delegate's declaration. The following pseudo-code approximates the basic pattern:

```
// This is only pseudo-code!
public sealed class DelegateName : System.MulticastDelegate
{
     public DelegateName (object target, uint functionAddress);
     public delegateReturnValue Invoke(allDelegateInputParams);
     public IAsyncResult BeginInvoke(allDelegateInputRefAndOutParams,
          AsyncCallback cb, object state);
     public delegateReturnValue EndInvoke(allDelegateRefAndOutParams,
          IAsyncResult result);
}
```

The System.MulticastDelegate and System.Delegate Base Classes

So, when you build a type using the C# `delegate` keyword, you indirectly declare a class type that derives from `System.MulticastDelegate`. This class provides descendents with access to a list that contains the addresses of the methods maintained by the delegate type, as well as several additional methods (and a few overloaded operators) to interact with the invocation list. Here are some select members of `System.MulticastDelegate`:

```
[Serializable]
public abstract class MulticastDelegate : Delegate
{
     // Methods
     public sealed override Delegate[] GetInvocationList();

     // Overloaded operators
     public static bool operator ==(MulticastDelegate d1, MulticastDelegate d2);
     public static bool operator !=(MulticastDelegate d1, MulticastDelegate d2);

     // Fields
     private IntPtr _invocationCount;
     private object _invocationList;
}
```

`System.MulticastDelegate` obtains additional functionality from its parent class, `System.Delegate`. Here is a partial snapshot of the class definition:

```
[Serializable, ClassInterface(ClassInterfaceType.AutoDual)]
public abstract class Delegate : ICloneable, ISerializable
{
     // Methods
     public static Delegate Combine(params Delegate[] delegates);
     public static Delegate Combine(Delegate a, Delegate b);
     public virtual Delegate[] GetInvocationList();
     public static Delegate Remove(Delegate source, Delegate value);
     public static Delegate RemoveAll(Delegate source, Delegate value);

     // Overloaded operators
     public static bool operator ==(Delegate d1, Delegate d2);
     public static bool operator !=( Delegate d1, Delegate d2);

     // Properties
     public MethodInfo Method { get; }
     public object Target { get; }
}
```

Now, remember that you will never directly derive from these base classes and can typically concern yourself only with the members documented in Table 8-1.

Table 8-1. *Select Members of* `System.MulticastDelegate/System.Delegate`

Inherited Member	Meaning in Life
`Method`	This property returns a `System.Reflection.MethodInfo` type that represents details of a static method that is maintained by the delegate.
`Target`	If the method to be called is defined at the object level (rather than a static method), `Target` returns the name of the method maintained by the delegate. If the value returned from `Target` equals null, the method to be called is a static member.
`Combine()`	This static method adds a method to the list maintained by the delegate. In C#, you trigger this method using the overloaded += operator as a shorthand notation.
`GetInvocationList()`	This method returns an array of `System.Delegate` types, each representing a particular method that may be invoked.
`Remove()` `RemoveAll()`	These static methods removes a method (or all methods) from the invocation list. In C#, the `Remove()` method can be called indirectly using the overloaded -= operator.

The Simplest Possible Delegate Example

Delegates can tend to cause a great deal of confusion when encountered for the first time. Thus, to get the ball rolling, let's take a look at a very simple example that leverages our `BinaryOp` delegate type. Here is the complete code, with analysis to follow:

```
namespace SimpleDelegate
{
    // This delegate can point to any method,
    // taking two integers and returning an
    // integer.
    public delegate int BinaryOp(int x, int y);

    // This class contains methods BinaryOp will
    // point to.
    public class SimpleMath
    {
        public static int Add(int x, int y)
        { return x + y; }
        public static int Subtract(int x, int y)
        { return x + y; }
    }

    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** Simple Delegate Example *****\n");

            // Create a BinaryOp object that
            // "points to" SimpleMath.Add().
            BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(SimpleMath.Add);
```

```
            // Invoke Add() method using delegate.
            Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 is {0}", b(10, 10));
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

Again notice the format of the `BinaryOp` delegate, which can point to any method taking two integers and returning an integer. Given this, we have created a class named `SimpleMath`, which defines two static methods that (surprise, surprise) match the pattern defined by the `BinaryOp` delegate.

When you want to insert the target method to a given delegate, simply pass in the name of the method to the delegate's constructor. At this point, you are able to invoke the member pointed to using a syntax that looks like a direct function invocation:

```
// Invoke() is really called here!
Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 is {0}", b(10, 10));
```

Under the hood, the runtime actually calls the compiler-generated `Invoke()` method. You can verify this fact for yourself if you open your assembly in `ildasm.exe` and investigate the CIL code within the `Main()` method:

```
.method private hidebysig static void Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
...
    .locals init ([0] class SimpleDelegate.BinaryOp b)
    ldftn int32 SimpleDelegate.SimpleMath::Add(int32, int32)
...
    newobj instance void SimpleDelegate.BinaryOp::.ctor(object, native int)
    stloc.0
    ldstr "10 + 10 is {0}"
    ldloc.0
    ldc.i4.s 10
    ldc.i4.s 10
    callvirt instance int32 SimpleDelegate.BinaryOp::Invoke(int32, int32)
...
}
```

Recall that .NET delegates (unlike C-style function pointers) are *type safe*. Therefore, if you attempt to pass a delegate a method that does not "match the pattern," you receive a compile-time error. To illustrate, assume the `SimpleMath` class defines an additional method named `SquareNumber()`:

```
public class SimpleMath
{
...
    public static int SquareNumber(int a)
    { return a * a; }
}
```

Given that the `BinaryOp` delegate can *only* point to methods that take two integers and return an integer, the following code is illegal and will not compile:

```
// Error! Method does not match delegate pattern!
BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(SimpleMath.SquareNumber);
```

Investigating a Delegate Object

Let's spice up the current example by creating a helper function named `DisplayDelegateInfo()`. This method will print out names of the methods maintained by the incoming `System.Delegate`-derived type as well as the name of the class defining the method. To do so, we will iterate over the

System.Delegate array returned by GetInvocationList(), invoking each object's Target and Method properties:

```
static void DisplayDelegateInfo(Delegate delObj)
{
     // Print the names of each member in the
     // delegate's invocation list.
     foreach (Delegate d in delObj.GetInvocationList())
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Method Name: {0}", d.Method);
          Console.WriteLine("Type Name: {0}", d.Target);
     }
}
```

Assuming you have updated your Main() method to actually call this new helper method, you would find the output shown in Figure 8-3.

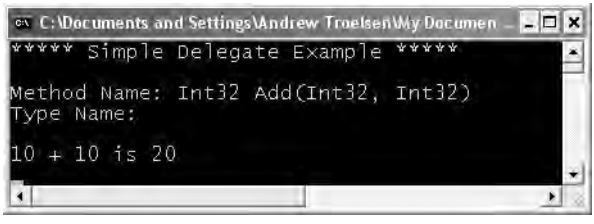

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documen
***** Simple Delegate Example *****
Method Name: Int32 Add(Int32, Int32)
Type Name:
10 + 10 is 20

Figure 8-3. *Examining a delegate's invocation list*

Notice that the name of the type (SimpleMath) is currently not displayed by the Target property. The reason has to do with the fact that our BinaryOp delegate is pointing to *static* methods and therefore there is no object to reference! However, if we update the Add() and Subtract methods to be nonstatic, we could create an instance of the SimpleMath type and specify the methods to invoke as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Simple Delegate Example *****\n");

     // .NET delegates can also point to instance methods.
     SimpleMath m = new SimpleMath();
     BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(m.Add);

     // Show information about this object.
     DisplayDelegateInfo(b);

     Console.WriteLine("\n10 + 10 is {0}", b(10, 10));
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

In this case, we would find the output shown in Figure 8-4.

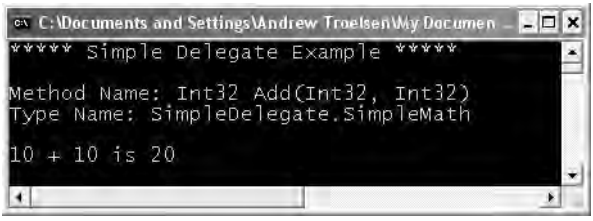

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documen
***** Simple Delegate Example *****
Method Name: Int32 Add(Int32, Int32)
Type Name: SimpleDelegate.SimpleMath
10 + 10 is 20

Figure 8-4. *Examining a delegate's invocation list (once again)*

■ **Source Code** The SimpleDelegate project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Retrofitting the Car Type with Delegates

Clearly, the previous `SimpleDelegate` example was intended to be purely illustrative in nature, given that there would be no reason to build a delegate simply to add two numbers. Hopefully, however, this example demystifies the process of working with delegate types. To provide a more realistic use of delegate types, let's retrofit our `Car` type to send the `Exploded` and `AboutToBlow` notifications using .NET delegates rather than a custom callback interface. Beyond no longer implementing `IEngineEvents`, here are the steps we will need to take:

- Define the `AboutToBlow` and `Exploded` delegates.
- Declare member variables of each delegate type in the `Car` class.
- Create helper functions on the `Car` that allow the caller to specify the methods maintained by the delegate member variables.
- Update the `Accelerate()` method to invoke the delegate's invocation list under the correct circumstances.

Ponder the following updated `Car` class, which addresses the first three points:

```
public class Car
{
    // Define the delegate types.
    public delegate void AboutToBlow(string msg);
    public delegate void Exploded (string msg);

    // Define member variables of each delegate type.
    private AboutToBlow almostDeadList;
    private Exploded explodedList;

    // Add members to the invocation lists using helper methods.
    public void OnAboutToBlow(AboutToBlow clientMethod)
    { almostDeadList = clientMethod; }
    public void OnExploded(Exploded clientMethod)
    { explodedList = clientMethod; }
...
}
```

Notice in this example that we define the delegate types directly within the scope of the `Car` type. As you explore the base class libraries, you will find it is quite common to define a delegate

within the scope of the type it naturally works with. On a related note, given that the compiler transforms a delegate into a full class definition, what we have actually done is create two nested classes.

Next, note that we declare two member variables (one for each delegate type) and two helper functions (`OnAboutToBlow()` and `OnExploded()`) that allow the client to add a method to the delegates invocation list. In concept, these methods are similar to the `Advise()` and `Unadvise()` method we created during the `EventInterface` example. Of course, in this case, the incoming parameter is a client-allocated delegate object rather than a class implementing a specific interface.

At this point, we need to update the `Accelerate()` method to invoke each delegate, rather than iterate over an `ArrayList` of client-side sinks (as we did in the `EventInterface` example). Here is the update:

```
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
    // If the car is dead, fire Exploded event.
    if (carIsDead)
    {
        if (explodedList != null)
            explodedList("Sorry, this car is dead...");
    }
    else
    {
        currSpeed += delta;

        // Almost dead?
        if (10 == maxSpeed - currSpeed
            && almostDeadList != null)
        {
            almostDeadList("Careful buddy!  Gonna blow!");
        }

        // Still OK!
        if (currSpeed >= maxSpeed)
            carIsDead = true;
        else
            Console.WriteLine("->CurrSpeed = {0}", currSpeed);
    }
}
```

Notice that before we invoke the methods maintained by the `almostDeadList` and `explodedList` member variables, we are checking them against a null value. The reason is that it will be the job of the caller to allocate these objects by calling the `OnAboutToBlow()` and `OnExploded()` helper methods. If the caller does not call these methods, and we attempt to invoke the delegate's invocation list, we will trigger a `NullReferenceException` and bomb at runtime (which would obviously be a bad thing!).

Now that we have the delegate infrastructure in place, observe the updates to the `Program` class:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Delegates as event enablers *****");

        // Make a car as usual.
        Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

        // Register event handlers with Car type.
        c1.OnAboutToBlow(new Car.AboutToBlow(CarAboutToBlow));
        c1.OnExploded(new Car.Exploded(CarExploded));
```

```
        // Speed up (this will trigger the events).
        Console.WriteLine("\n***** Speeding up *****");
        for (int i = 0; i < 6; i++)
            c1.Accelerate(20);
        Console.ReadLine();
    }

    // The Car will call these methods.
    public static void CarAboutToBlow(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine(msg); }

    public static void CarExploded(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine(msg); }
}
```

The only major point to be made here is the fact that the caller is the entity that assigns the delegate member variables via the helper registration methods. Also, because the `AboutToBlow` and `Exploded` delegates are nested within the `Car` class, we must allocate them using their full name (e.g., `Car.AboutToBlow`). Like any delegate constructor, we pass in the name of the method to add to the invocation list, which in this case are two static members on the `Program` class (if you wanted to wrap these methods in a new class, it would look very similar to the `CarEventSink` type of the `EventInterface` example).

Enabling Multicasting

Recall that .NET delegates have the intrinsic ability to *multicast*. In other words, a delegate object can maintain a list of methods to call, rather than a single method. When you wish to add multiple methods to a delegate object, you simply make use of the overloaded `+=` operator, rather than a direct assignment. To enable multicasting on the `Car` type, we could update the `OnAboutToBlow()` and `OnExploded()` methods as follows:

```
public class Car
{
     // Add member to the invocation lists.
    public void OnAboutToBlow(AboutToBlow clientMethod)
    { almostDeadList += clientMethod; }

    public void OnExploded(Exploded clientMethod)
    { explodedList += clientMethod; }
...
}
```

With this, the caller can now register multiple targets:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

        // Register multiple event handlers!
        c1.OnAboutToBlow(new Car.AboutToBlow(CarAboutToBlow));
        c1.OnAboutToBlow(new Car.AboutToBlow(CarIsAlmostDoomed));
        c1.OnExploded(new Car.Exploded(CarExploded));
...
    }
```

```
    // Car will call these.
    public static void CarAboutToBlow(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine(msg); }
    public static void CarIsAlmostDoomed(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine("Critical Message from Car: {0}", msg); }
    public static void CarExploded(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine(msg); }
}
```

In terms of CIL code, the += operator resolves to a call to the static `Delegate.Combine()` method (you could call `Delegate.Combine()` directly, but the += operator offers a simpler alternative). Ponder the following CIL implementation of `OnAboutToBlow()`:

```
.method public hidebysig instance void OnAboutToBlow
     (class CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow clientMethod) cil managed
{
     .maxstack  8
     ldarg.0
     dup
     ldfld class CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow CarDelegate.Car::almostDeadList
     ldarg.1
     call class [mscorlib]System.Delegate
          [mscorlib]System.Delegate::Combine(
               class [mscorlib]System.Delegate,
               class [mscorlib]System.Delegate)
     castclass  CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow
     stfld class CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow CarDelegate.Car::almostDeadList
     ret
}
```

The `Delegate` class also defines a static `Remove()` method that allows a caller to dynamically remove a member from the invocation list. As you may be suspecting, C# developers can leverage the overloaded -= operator as a shorthand notation. If you wish to allow the caller the option to detach from the `AboutToBlow` and `Exploded` notifications, you could add the following additional helper methods to the `Car` type (note the -= operators at work):

```
public class Car
{
     // Remove member from the invocation lists.
     public void RemoveAboutToBlow(AboutToBlow clientMethod)
     { almostDeadList -= clientMethod; }

     public void RemoveExploded(Exploded clientMethod)
     { explodedList -= clientMethod; }
...
}
```

Again, the -= syntax is simply a shorthand notation for manually calling the static `Delegate.Remove()` method, as illustrated by the following CIL code for the `RemoveAboutToBlow()` member of the `Car` type:

```
.method public hidebysig instance void  RemoveAboutToBlow(class
CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow clientMethod) cil managed
{
     .maxstack  8
     ldarg.0
     dup
     ldfld class CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow CarDelegate.Car::almostDeadList
     ldarg.1
     call class [mscorlib]System.Delegate
```

```
        [mscorlib]System.Delegate::Remove(
        class [mscorlib]System.Delegate,
        class [mscorlib]System.Delegate)
    castclass CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow
    stfld class CarDelegate.Car/AboutToBlow CarDelegate.Car::almostDeadList
    ret
}
```

If the caller does indeed wish to remove an item from a delegate's invocation list, you will need to supply the same delegate object you added previously. Thus, we could stop receiving the `Exploded` notification by updating `Main()` as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

    // Hold onto Car.Exploded delegate object for later use.
    Car.Exploded d = new Car.Exploded(CarExploded);
    c1.OnExploded(d);
...
    // Remove CarExploded method
    // from invocation list.
    c1.RemoveExploded(d);
...
}
```

The output of our `CarDelegate` application can be seen in Figure 8-5.

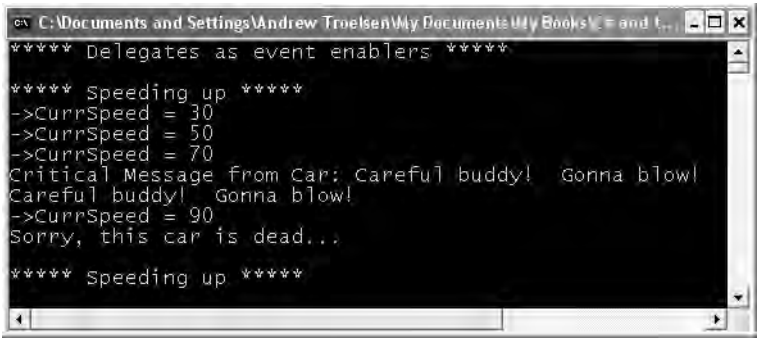

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and t...
***** Delegates as event enablers *****
***** Speeding up *****
->CurrSpeed = 30
->CurrSpeed = 50
->CurrSpeed = 70
Critical Message from Car: Careful buddy! Gonna blow!
Careful buddy! Gonna blow!
->CurrSpeed = 90
Sorry, this car is dead...
***** Speeding up *****

Figure 8-5. *The* `CarDelegate` *application at work*

■ **Source Code** The CarDelegate project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

A More Elaborate Delegate Example

To illustrate a more advanced use of delegates, let's begin by updating the `Car` class to include two new Boolean member variables. The first is used to determine whether your automobile is due for a wash (`isDirty`); the other represents whether the car in question is in need of a tire rotation (`shouldRotate`). To enable the object user to interact with this new state data, `Car` also defines some additional properties and an updated constructor. Here is the story so far:

```
// Updated Car class.
public class Car
{
...
     // Are we in need of a wash? Need to rotate tires?
     private bool isDirty;
     private bool shouldRotate;

     // Extra params to set bools.
     public Car(string name, int max, int curr,
          bool washCar, bool rotateTires)
     {
          ...
          isDirty = washCar;
          shouldRotate = rotateTires;
     }
     public bool Dirty
     {
          get{  return isDirty; }
          set{  isDirty = value; }
     }
     public bool Rotate
     {
          get{  return shouldRotate; }
          set{  shouldRotate = value; }
     }
}
```

Now, also assume the `Car` type nests a new delegate, `CarDelegate`:

```
// Car defines yet another delegate.
public class Car
{
...
     // Can call any method taking a Car as
     // a parameter and returning nothing.
     public delegate void CarDelegate(Car c);
...
}
```

Here, you have created a delegate named `CarDelegate`. The `CarDelegate` type represents "some function" taking a `Car` as a parameter and returning void.

Delegates As Parameters

Now that you have a new delegate type that points to methods taking a `Car` parameter and returning nothing, you can create other functions that take this delegate as a parameter. To illustrate, assume you have a new class named `Garage`. This type maintains a collection of `Car` types contained in a `System.Collections.ArrayList`. Upon creation, the `ArrayList` is filled with some initial `Car` types:

```
// The Garage class maintains a list of Car types.
Using System.Collections;
...
public class Garage
{
     // A list of all cars in the garage.
     ArrayList theCars = new ArrayList();
```

```
    // Create the cars in the garage.
    public Garage()
    {
        // Recall, we updated the ctor to set isDirty and shouldRotate.
        theCars.Add(new Car("Viper", 100, 0, true, false));
        theCars.Add(new Car("Fred", 100, 0, false, false));
        theCars.Add(new Car("BillyBob", 100, 0, false, true));
    }
}
```

More importantly, the `Garage` class defines a public `ProcessCars()` method, which takes a single argument of our new delegate type (`Car.CarDelegate`). In the implementation of `ProcessCars()`, you pass each `Car` in your collection as a parameter to the "function pointed to" by the delegate. `ProcessCars()` also makes use of the `Target` and `Method` members of `System.MulticastDelegate` to determine exactly which function the delegate is currently pointing to:

```
// The Garage class has a method that makes use of the CarDelegate.
Using System.Collections;
...
public class Garage
{
...
    // This method takes a Car.CarDelegate as a parameter.
    public void ProcessCars(Car.CarDelegate proc)
    {
        // Where are we forwarding the call?
        Console.WriteLine("***** Calling: {0}  *****",
            d.Method);

        // Are we calling an instance method or a static method?
        if(proc.Target != null)
            Console.WriteLine("->Target: {0} ", proc.Target);
        else
            Console.WriteLine("->Target is a static method");

        // Call the method "pointed to," passing in each car.
        foreach (Car c in theCars)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("\n-> Processing a Car");
            proc(c);
        }
    }
}
```

Like any delegate operation, when calling `ProcessCars()`, we send in the name of the method that should handle this request. Recall that these methods may be either static or instance level. For the sake of argument, assume these are instance members named `WashCar()` and `RotateTires()` that are defined by a new class named `ServiceDepartment`. Notice that these two methods are making use of the new `Rotate` and `Dirty` properties of the `Car` type.

```
// This class defines method to be invoked by
// the Car.CarDelegate type.
public class ServiceDepartment
{
    public void WashCar(Car c)
    {
```

```
        if(c.Dirty)
            Console.WriteLine("Cleaning a car");
        else
            Console.WriteLine("This car is already clean...");
    }

    public void RotateTires(Car c)
    {
        if(c.Rotate)
            Console.WriteLine("Tires have been rotated");
        else
            Console.WriteLine("Don't need to be rotated...");
    }
}
```

Now, to illustrate the interplay between the new `Car.CarDelegate`, `Garage`, and `ServiceDepartment` types, consider the following usage:

```
// The Garage delegates all work orders to the ServiceDepartment
// (finding a good mechanic is always a problem...)
public class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        // Make the garage.
        Garage g = new Garage();

        // Make the service department.
        ServiceDepartment sd = new ServiceDepartment();

        // The Garage washes cars and rotates tires
        // by delegating to the ServiceDepartment.
        g.ProcessCars(new Car.CarDelegate(sd.WashCar));
        g.ProcessCars(new Car.CarDelegate(sd.RotateTires));
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Figure 8-6 shows the current output.

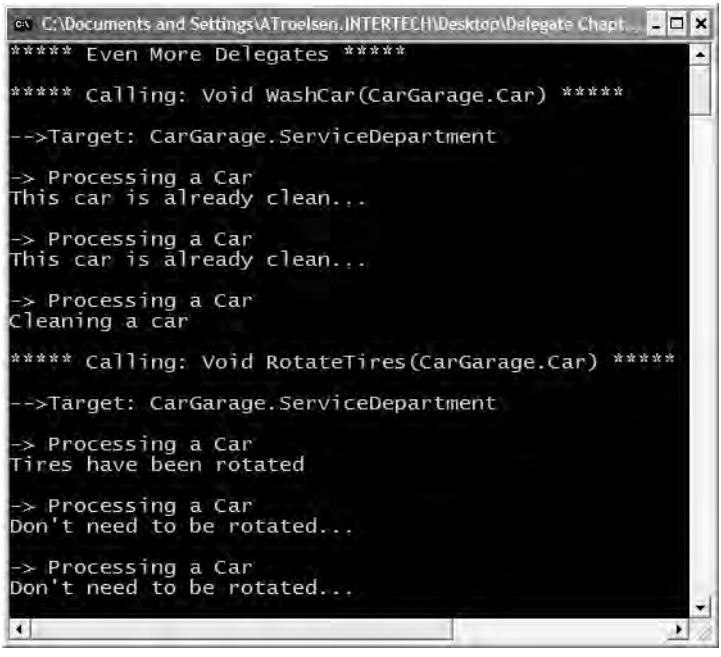

C:\Documents and Settings\ATroelsen.INTERTECH\Desktop\Delegate Chapt...
***** Even More Delegates *****
***** Calling: Void WashCar(CarGarage.Car) *****
-->Target: CarGarage.ServiceDepartment
-> Processing a Car
This car is already clean...
-> Processing a Car
This car is already clean...
-> Processing a Car
Cleaning a car
***** Calling: Void RotateTires(CarGarage.Car) *****
-->Target: CarGarage.ServiceDepartment
-> Processing a Car
Tires have been rotated
-> Processing a Car
Don't need to be rotated...
-> Processing a Car
Don't need to be rotated...

Figure 8-6. *Passing the buck*

Analyzing the Delegation Code

The `Main()` method begins by creating an instance of the `Garage` and `ServiceDepartment` types. Now, when you write the following:

```
// Wash all dirty cars.
g.ProcessCars(new Car.CarDelegate(sd.WashCar));
```

what you are effectively saying is "Add a pointer to the `ServiceDepartment.WashCar()` method to a `Car.CarDelegate` object, and pass this object to `Garage.ProcessCars()`." Like most real-world garages, the real work is delegated to the service department (which explains why a 30-minute oil change takes 2 hours). Given this, `ProcessCars()` can be understood as

```
// CarDelegate points to the ServiceDepartment.WashCar function.
public void ProcessCars(Car.CarDelegate proc)
{
...
     foreach(Car c in theCars)
          proc(c);     // proc(c) => ServiceDepartment.WashCar(c)
}
```

Likewise, if you say the following:

```
// Rotate the tires.
g.ProcessCars(new Car.CarDelegate(sd.RotateTires));
```

then `ProcessCars()` can be understood as

```
// CarDelegate points to the ServiceDepartment.RotateTires function:
public void ProcessCars(Car.CarDelegate proc)
{
```

```
     foreach(Car c in theCars)
          proc(c);     // proc(c) => ServiceDepartment.RotateTires(c)
...
}
```

■ **Source Code** The CarGarage project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Understanding Delegate Covariance

Hopefully at this point in the game, you are more comfortable with the creation and use of delegate types. Before turning our attention to the C# event syntax, let's examine a new delegate-centric feature provided by .NET 2.0 termed *covariance*. As you may have noticed, each of the delegates created thus far point to methods returning simple numerical data types (or void). However, assume you are designing a delegate that can point to methods returning a custom class type:

```
// Define a deletate pointing to targets returning Car types.
public delegate Car ObtainCarDelegate();
```

Of course, you would be able to define a target for the delegate as expected:

```
class Program
{
     public delegate Car ObtainCarDelegate();

     public static Car GetBasicCar()
     { return new Car(); }

     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          ObtainCarDelegate targetA = new ObtainCarDelegate(GetBasicCar);
          Car c = targetA();
          Console.ReadLine();
     }
}
```

So far, so good. However, what if you were to derive a new class from the `Car` type named `SportsCar` and wish to create a delegate type that can point to methods returning this class type? Prior to .NET 2.0, you would be required to define an entirely new delegate to do so:

```
// A new deletate pointing to targets returning SportsCar types.
public delegate SportsCar ObtainSportsCarDelegate();
```

As we now have two delegate types, we now must create an instance of each to obtain `Car` and `SportsCar` types:

```
class Program
{
     public delegate Car ObtainCarDelegate();
     public delegate SportsCar ObtainSportsCarDelegate();

     public static Car GetBasicCar()
     { return new Car(); }

     public static SportsCar GetSportsCar()
     { return new SportsCar(); }
```

```
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        ObtainCarDelegate targetA = new ObtainCarDelegate(GetBasicCar);
        Car c = targetA();

        ObtainSportsCarDelegate targetB =
            new ObtainSportsCarDelegate(GetSportsCar);
        SportsCar sc = targetB();
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Given the laws of classic inheritance, it would be ideal to build a single delegate type that can point to methods returning *either* `Car` *or* `SportsCar` types (after all, a `SportsCar` "is-a" `Car`). *Covariance* allows for this very possibility. Simply put, covariance allows you to build a single delegate that can point to methods returning class types related by classical inheritance:

```
class Program
{
    // Define a single deletate that may return a Car
    // or SportsCar.
    public delegate Car ObtainVehicalDelegate();

    public static Car GetBasicCar()
    { return new Car(); }

    public static SportsCar GetSportsCar()
    { return new SportsCar(); }

    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Delegate Covariance *****\n");
        ObtainVehicalDelegate targetA = new ObtainVehicalDelegate(GetBasicCar);
        Car c = targetA();

        // Covariance allows this target assignment.
        ObtainVehicalDelegate targetB = new ObtainVehicalDelegate(GetSportsCar);
        SportsCar sc = (SportsCar)targetB();
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Notice that the `ObtainVehicalDelegate` delegate type has been defined to point to methods returning a strongly typed `Car` type. Given covariance, however, we can point to methods returning derived types as well. To obtain the derived type, simply perform an explicit cast.

■ **Note** In a similar vein, *contravariance* allows you to create a single delegate that can point to numerous methods that receive objects related by classical inheritance. Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK Documentation for further details.

■ **Source Code** The DelegateCovariance project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Understanding C# Events

Delegates are fairly interesting constructs in that they enable two objects in memory to engage in a two-way conversation. As you may agree, however, working with delegates in the raw does entail a good amount of boilerplate code (defining the delegate, declaring necessary member variables, and creating custom registration/unregistration methods).

Because the ability for one object to call back to another object is such a helpful construct, C# provides the `event` keyword to lessen the burden of using delegates in the raw. When the compiler processes the `event` keyword, you are automatically provided with registration and unregistration methods as well as any necessary member variable for your delegate types. In this light, the `event` keyword is little more than syntactic sugar, which can be used to save you some typing time.

■ **Note** Even if you choose to leverage the C# `event` keyword, you are still required to manually define the related delegate types.

Defining an event is a two-step process. First, you need to define a delegate that contains the methods to be called when the event is fired. Next, you declare the events (using the C# `event` keyword) in terms of the related delegate. In a nutshell, defining a type that can send events entails the following pattern (shown in pseudo-code):

```
public class SenderOfEvents
{
     public delegate retval AssociatedDelegate(args);
     public event AssociatedDelegate NameOfEvent;
...
}
```

The events of the `Car` type will take the same name as the previous delegates (`AboutToBlow` and `Exploded`). The new delegate to which the events are associated will be called `CarEventHandler`. Here are the initial updates to the `Car` type:

```
public class Car
{
     // This delegate works in conjunction with the
     // Car's events.
     public delegate void CarEventHandler(string msg);

     // This car can send these events.
     public event CarEventHandler Exploded;
     public event CarEventHandler AboutToBlow;
 ...
}
```

Sending an event to the caller is as simple as specifying the event by name as well as any required parameters as defined by the associated delegate. To ensure that the caller has indeed registered with event, you will want to check the event against a null value before invoking the delegate's method set. These things being said, here is the new iteration of the `Car`'s `Accelerate()` method:

```
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
    // If the car is dead, fire Exploded event.
    if (carIsDead)
    {
```

```
        if (Exploded != null)
            Exploded("Sorry, this car is dead...");
    }

    else
    {
        currSpeed += delta;

        // Almost dead?
        if (10 == maxSpeed - currSpeed
            && AboutToBlow != null)
        {
            AboutToBlow("Careful buddy!  Gonna blow!");
        }

        // Still OK!
        if (currSpeed >= maxSpeed)
            carIsDead = true;
        else
            Console.WriteLine("->CurrSpeed = {0}", currSpeed);
    }
}
```

With this, you have configured the car to send two custom events without the need to define custom registration functions. You will see the usage of this new automobile in just a moment, but first, let's check the event architecture in a bit more detail.

Events Under the Hood

A C# event actually expands into two hidden public methods, one having an `add_` prefix; the other having a `remove_` prefix. This prefix is followed by the name of the C# event. For example, the `Exploded` event results in two CIL methods named `add_Exploded()` and `remove_Exploded()`. In addition to the `add_XXX()` and `remove_XXX()` methods, the CIL-level event definition associates the correct delegate to a given event.

If you were to check out the CIL instructions behind `add_AboutToBlow()`, you would find code that looks just about identical to the `OnAboutToBlow()` helper method you wrote previously in the `CarDelegate` example (note the call to `Delegate.Combine()`):

```
.method public hidebysig specialname instance void
     add_AboutToBlow(class CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler 'value')
     cil managed synchronized
{
     .maxstack  8
     ldarg.0
     ldarg.0
     ldfld class CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler CarEvents.Car::AboutToBlow
     ldarg.1
     call class [mscorlib]System.Delegate
     [mscorlib]System.Delegate::Combine(
         class [mscorlib]System.Delegate, class [mscorlib]System.Delegate)
     castclass CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler
     stfld class CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler CarEvents.Car::AboutToBlow
     ret
}
```

As you would expect, `remove_AboutToBlow()` will indirectly call `Delegate.Remove()` and is more or less identical to the previous `RemoveAboutToBlow()` helper method:

```
.method public hidebysig specialname instance void
     remove_AboutToBlow(class CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler 'value')
     cil managed synchronized
{
     .maxstack  8
     ldarg.0
     ldarg.0
     ldfld class CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler CarEvents.Car::AboutToBlow
     ldarg.1
     call class [mscorlib]System.Delegate
          [mscorlib]System.Delegate::Remove(
          class [mscorlib]System.Delegate, class [mscorlib]System.Delegate)
     castclass CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler
     stfld class CarEvents.Car/CarEventHandler CarEvents.Car::AboutToBlow
     ret
}
```

Finally, the CIL code representing the event itself makes use of the `.addon` and `.removeon` directives to map the names of the correct `add_XXX()` and `remove_XXX()` methods to invoke:

```
.event CarEvents.Car/EngineHandler AboutToBlow
{
     .addon void CarEvents.Car::add_AboutToBlow
          (class CarEvents.Car/CarEngineHandler)
     .removeon void CarEvents.Car::remove_AboutToBlow
          (class CarEvents.Car/CarEngineHandler)
}
```

Now that you understand how to build a class that can send C# events (and are aware that events are nothing more than a typing time-saver), the next big question is how to "listen to" the incoming events on the caller's side.

Listening to Incoming Events

C# events also simplify the act of registering the caller-side event handlers. Rather than having to specify custom helper methods, the caller simply makes use of the `+=` and `-=` operators directly (which triggers the correct `add_XXX()` or `remove_XXX()` method in the background). When you wish to register with an event, follow the pattern shown here:

```
// ObjectVariable.EventName +=
// new AssociatedDelegate(functionToCall);
Car.EngineHandler d = new Car.EngineHandler(CarExplodedEventHandler)
myCar.Exploded += d;
```

When you wish to detach from a source of events, use the `-=` operator:

```
// ObjectVariable.EventName -= delegateObject;
myCar.Exploded -= d;
```

Given these very predictable patterns, here is the refactored `Main()` method, now using the C# event registration syntax:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Events *****");
        Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);
```

```
        // Register event handlers.
        c1.AboutToBlow += new Car.CarEventHandler(CarIsAlmostDoomed);
        c1.AboutToBlow += new Car.CarEventHandler(CarAboutToBlow);

        Car.CarEventHandler d = new Car.CarEventHandler(CarExploded);
        c1.Exploded += d;

        Console.WriteLine("\n***** Speeding up *****");
        for (int i = 0; i < 6; i++)
            c1.Accelerate(20);

        // Remove CarExploded method
        // from invocation list.
        c1.Exploded -= d;

        Console.WriteLine("\n***** Speeding up *****");
        for (int i = 0; i < 6; i++)
            c1.Accelerate(20);
        Console.ReadLine();
    }

    public static void CarAboutToBlow(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine(msg); }
    public static void CarIsAlmostDoomed(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine("Critical Message from Car: {0}", msg); }
    public static void CarExploded(string msg)
    { Console.WriteLine(msg); }
}
```

Source Code The CarEvents project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Simplifying Event Registration Using Visual Studio 2005

Visual Studio .NET 2003 and Visual Studio 2005 each offer assistance with the process of registering event handlers. When you apply the += syntax during the act of event registration, you will find an IntelliSense window is displayed inviting you to hit the Tab key to auto-fill the associated delegate instance (see Figure 8-7).

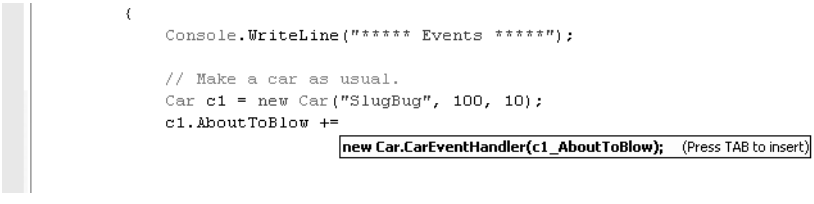

{
Console.WriteLine("***** Events *****");
// Make a car as usual.
Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);
c1.AboutToBlow +=
new Car.CarEventHandler(c1_AboutToBlow); (Press TAB to insert)

Figure 8-7. *Delegate selection IntelliSense*

Once you do hit the Tab key, you are then invited to enter the name of the event handler to be generated (or simply accept the default name) as shown in Figure 8-8.

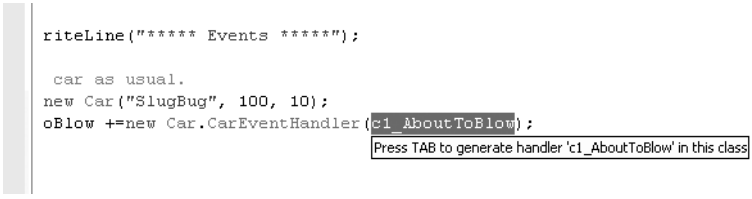

riteLine("***** Events *****");
car as usual.
new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);
oBlow +=new Car.CarEventHandler(c1_AboutToBlow);
Press TAB to generate handler 'c1_AboutToBlow' in this class

Figure 8-8. *Delegate target format IntelliSense*

Once you hit the Tab key again, you will be provided with stub code in the correct format of the delegate target (note that this method has been declared static due to the fact that the event was registered within a static method):

```
static void c1_AboutToBlow(string msg)
{
     // Add your code!
}
```

This IntelliSense feature is available to all .NET events in the base class libraries. This IDE feature is a massive timesaver, given that this removes you from the act of needing to search the .NET help system to figure out the correct delegate to use with a particular event as well as the format of the delegate target.

A "Prim-and-Proper" Event

Truth be told, there is one final enhancement we could make to the `CarEvents` example that mirrors Microsoft's recommended event pattern. As you begin to explore the events sent by a given type in the base class libraries, you will find that the first parameter of the underlying delegate is a `System.Object`, while the second parameter is a type deriving from `System.EventArgs`.

The `System.Object` argument represents a reference to the object that sent the event (such as the `Car`), while the second parameter represents information regarding the event at hand. The `System.EventArgs` base class represents an event that is not sending any custom information:

```
public class EventArgs
{
    public static readonly System.EventArgs Empty;
    public EventArgs();
}
```

For simple events, you can pass an instance of `EventArgs` directly. However, when you wish to pass along custom data, you should build a suitable class deriving from `EventArgs`. For our example, assume we have a class named `CarEventArgs`, which maintains a string representing the message sent to the receiver:

```
public class CarEventArgs : EventArgs
{
    public readonly string msg;
    public CarEventArgs(string message)
    {
        msg = message;
    }
}
```

With this, we would now update the `CarEventHandler` delegate as follows (the events would be unchanged):

```
public class Car
{
    public delegate void CarEventHandler(object sender, CarEventArgs e);
...
}
```

When firing our events from within the `Accelerate()` method, we would now need to supply a reference to the current `Car` (via the `this` keyword) and an instance of our `CarEventArgs` type:

```
public void Accelerate(int delta)
{
    // If the car is dead, fire Exploded event.
    if (carIsDead)
    {
        if (Exploded != null)
            Exploded(this, new CarEventArgs("Sorry, this car is dead..."));
    }
    else
    {
...
            AboutToBlow(this, new CarEventArgs("Careful buddy!  Gonna blow!"));
    }
...
}
```

On the caller's side, all we would need to do is update our event handlers to receive the incoming parameters and obtain the message via our read-only field. For example:

```
public static void CarAboutToBlow(object sender, CarEventArgs e)
{ Console.WriteLine("{0} says: {1}", sender, e.msg); }
```

If the receiver wishes to interact with the object that sent the event, we can explicitly cast the `System.Object`. Thus, if we wish to power down the radio when the `Car` object is about to meet its maker, we could author an event handler looking something like the following:

```
public static void CarIsAlmostDoomed(object sender, CarEventArgs e)
{
    // Just to be safe, perform a
    // runtime check before casting.
    if (sender is Car)
    {
        Car c = (Car)sender;
        c.CrankTunes(false);
    }
        Console.WriteLine("Critical Message from {0}: {1}", sender, e.msg);
}
```

■ **Source Code** The PrimAndProperCarEvents project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Understanding C# Anonymous Methods

To wrap up this chapter, let's examine some final delegate-and-event-centric features of .NET 2.0 as seen through the eyes of C#. To begin, consider the fact that when a caller wishes to listen to incoming events, it must define a unique method that matches the signature of the associated delegate:

```
class SomeCaller
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          SomeType t = new SomeType();
          t.SomeEvent += new SomeDelegate(MyEventHandler);
     }

     // Typically only called by the SomeDelegate object.
     public static void MyEventHandler()
     { ...}
}
```

When you think about it, however, methods such as `MyEventHandler()` are seldom intended to be called by any part of the program other than the invoking delegate. As far as productivity is concerned, it is a bit of a bother (though in no way a showstopper) to manually define a separate method to be called by the delegate object.

To address this point, it is now possible to associate a delegate directly to a block of code statements at the time of event registration. Formally, such code is termed an *anonymous method*. To illustrate the basic syntax, check out the following `Main()` method, which handles the events sent from the `Car` type using anonymous methods, rather than specifically named event handlers:

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Anonymous Methods *****\n");
          Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

          // Register event handlers as anonymous methods.
          c1.AboutToBlow += delegate {
               Console.WriteLine("Eek! Going too fast!");
          };

          c1.AboutToBlow += delegate(object sender, CarEventArgs e) {
               Console.WriteLine("Message from Car: {0}", e.msg);
          };

          c1.Exploded += delegate(object sender, CarEventArgs e) {
               Console.WriteLine("Fatal Message from Car: {0}", e.msg);
          };
        ...
     }
}
```

■ **Note** The final curly bracket of an anonymous method must be terminated by a semicolon. If you fail to do so, you are issued a compilation error.

Again, notice that the `Program` type no longer defines specific static event handlers such as `CarAboutToBlow()` or `CarExploded()`. Rather, the unnamed (aka anonymous) methods are defined inline at the time the caller is handling the event using the `+=` syntax.

The basic syntax of an anonymous method matches the following pseudo-code:

```
class SomeCaller
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          SomeType t = new SomeType();
          t.SomeEvent += delegate (optionallySpecifiedDelegateArgs)
               { /* statements */ };
     }
}
```

When handling the first `AboutToBlow` event within the previous `Main()` method, notice that you are not defining the arguments passed by the delegate:

```
c1.AboutToBlow += delegate {
     Console.WriteLine("Eek! Going too fast!");
};
```

Strictly speaking, you are not required to receive the incoming arguments sent by a specific event. However, if you wish to make use of the possible incoming arguments, you will need to specify the parameters prototyped by the delegate type (as seen in the second handling of the `AboutToBlow` and `Exploded` events). For example:

```
c1.AboutToBlow += delegate(object sender, CarEventArgs e) {
     Console.WriteLine("Critical Message from Car: {0}", e.msg);
};
```

Accessing "Outer" Variables

Anonymous methods are interesting in that they are able to access the local variables of the method that defines them. Formally speaking, such variables are termed "outer variables" of the anonymous method. To illustrate, assume our `Main()` method defined a local integer named `aboutToBlowCounter`. Within the anonymous methods that handle the `AboutToBlow` event, we will increment this counter by 1 and print out the tally before `Main()` completes:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     int aboutToBlowCounter = 0;

     // Make a car as usual.
     Car c1 = new Car("SlugBug", 100, 10);

     // Register event handlers as anonymous methods.
     c1.AboutToBlow += delegate
     {
          aboutToBlowCounter++;
          Console.WriteLine("Eek!  Going too fast!");
     };

     c1.AboutToBlow += delegate(string msg)
     {
          aboutToBlowCounter++;
          Console.WriteLine("Critical Message from Car: {0}", msg);
     };
...
     Console.WriteLine("AboutToBlow event was fired {0} times.",
          aboutToBlowCounter);
     Console.ReadLine();
```

Once you run this updated `Main()` method, you will find the final `Console.WriteLine()` reports the `AboutToBlow` event was fired twice.

■ **Note** An anonymous method cannot access `ref` or `out` parameters of the defining method.

C# Method Group Conversions

Another delegate-and-event-centric feature of C# is termed *method group conversion*. This feature allows you to register the "simple" name of an event handler. To illustrate, let's revisit the `SimpleMath` type examined earlier in this chapter, which is now updated with a new event named `ComputationFinished`:

```
public class SimpleMath
{
     // Not bothering to create a System.EventArgs
     // derived type here.
     public delegate void MathMessage(string msg);
     public event MathMessage ComputationFinished;

     public int Add(int x, int y)
     {
          ComputationFinished("Adding complete.");
          return x + y;
     }

     public int Subtract(int x, int y)
     {
          ComputationFinished("Subtracting complete.");
          return x - y;
     }
}
```

If we are not using anonymous method syntax, you know that the way we would handle the `ComputationComplete` event is as follows:

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          SimpleMath m = new SimpleMath();
          m.ComputationFinished +=
               new SimpleMath.MathMessage(ComputationFinishedHandler);
          Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 is {0}", m.Add(10, 10));
          Console.ReadLine();
    }

     static void ComputationFinishedHandler(string msg)
     { Console.WriteLine(msg); }
}
```

However, we can register the event handler with a specific event like this (the remainder of the code is identical):

```
m.ComputationFinished += ComputationFinishedHandler;
```

Notice that we are not directly "new-ing" the associated delegate type, but rather simply specifying a method that matches the delegate's expected signature (a method returning nothing and taking a single `System.String` in this case). Understand that the C# compiler is still ensuring type safety. Thus, if the `ComputationFinishedHandler()` method did not take a `System.String` and return void, we would be issued a compiler error.

It is also possible to explicitly convert an event hander into an instance of the delegate it relates to. This can be helpful if you need to obtain the underlying delegate using a predefined method. For example:

```
// .NET 2.0 allows event handlers to be converted into
// their underlying delegate.
SimpleMath.MathMessage mmDelegate =
     (SimpleMath.MathMessage)ComputationFinishedHandler;
Console.WriteLine(mmDelegate.Method);
```

If you executed this code, the final `Console.WriteLine()` prints out the signature of `ComputationFinishedHandler`, as shown in Figure 8-9.

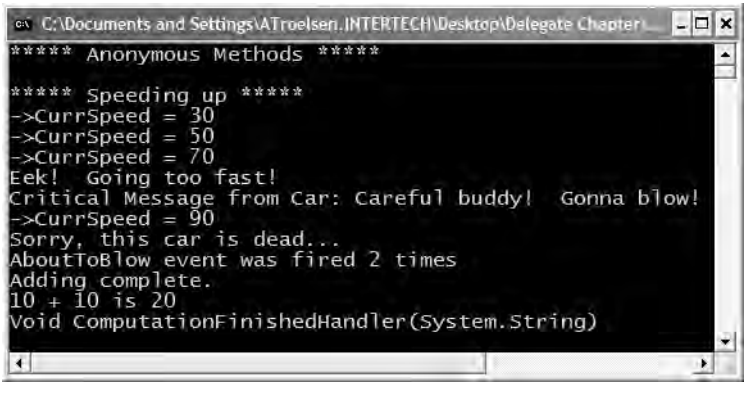

C:\Documents and Settings\ATroelsen.INTERTECH\Desktop\Delegate Chapter\
***** Anonymous Methods *****
***** Speeding up *****
->CurrSpeed = 30
->CurrSpeed = 50
->CurrSpeed = 70
Eek! Going too fast!
Critical Message from Car: Careful buddy! Gonna blow!
->CurrSpeed = 90
Sorry, this car is dead...
AboutToBlow event was fired 2 times
Adding complete.
10 + 10 is 20
Void ComputationFinishedHandler(System.String)

Figure 8-9. *You can extract a delegate from the related event handler.*

■ **Source Code** The AnonymousMethods project is located under the Chapter 8 subdirectory.

Summary

In this chapter, you have examined a number of ways in which multiple objects can partake in a bidirectional conversation. First, you examined the use of *callback interfaces*, which provide a way to have object B make calls on object A through a common interface type. Do understand that this design pattern is not specific to .NET, but may be employed in any language or platform that honors the use of interface-based programming techniques.

Next, you examined the C# `delegate` keyword, which is used to indirectly construct a class derived from `System.MulticastDelegate`. As you have seen, a delegate is simply an object that maintains a list of methods to call when told to do so. These invocations may be made synchronously (using the `Invoke()` method) or asynchronously (via the `BeginInvoke()` and `EndInvoke()` methods). Again, the asynchronous nature of .NET delegate types will be examined at a later time.

You then examined the C# `event` keyword which, when used in conjunction with a delegate type, can simplify the process of sending your event notifications to awaiting callers. As shown via the resulting CIL, the .NET event model maps to hidden calls on the `System.Delegate/System.Multicast-Delegate` types. In this light, the C# `event` keyword is purely optional in that it simply saves you some typing time.

Finally, this chapter examined a new C# 2005 language feature termed *anonymous methods*. Using this syntactic construct, you are able to directly associate a block of code statements to a given event. As you have seen, anonymous methods are free to ignore the parameters sent by the event and have access to the "outer variables" of the defining method. Last but not least, you examined a simplified way to register events using *method group conversion*.

CHAPTER 9

Advanced C# Type Construction Techniques

In this chapter, you'll deepen your understanding of the C# programming language by examining a number of advanced (but still quite useful) syntactic constructs. To begin, you'll learn how to construct and use an indexer method. This C# mechanism enables you to build custom types that provide access to internal subtypes using an array-like syntax. Once you learn how to build an indexer method, you'll then examine how to overload various operators (+, –, <, >, and so forth), and create custom explicit and implicit conversion routines for your types (and you'll learn why you may wish to do so).

The later half of this chapter examines a small set of lesser used (but nonetheless interesting) C# keywords. For example, you'll learn how to programmatically account for overflow and underflow conditions using the `checked` and `unchecked` keywords, as well as how to create an "unsafe" code context in order to directly manipulate pointer types using C#. The chapter wraps up with an examination of the role of C# preprocessor directives.

Building a Custom Indexer

As programmers, we are very familiar with the process of accessing discrete items contained within a standard array using the index operator, for example:

```
// Declare an array of integers.
int[] myInts = { 10, 9, 100, 432, 9874};

// Use the [] operator to access each element.
for(int j = 0; j < myInts.Length; j++)
     Console.WriteLine("Index {0}  = {1} ", j,  myInts[j]);
```

The previous code is by no means a major newsflash. However, the C# language provides the capability to build custom classes and structures that may be indexed just like a standard array. It should be no big surprise that the method that provides the capability to access items in this manner is termed an *indexer*.

Before exploring how to create such a construct, let's begin by seeing one in action. Assume you have added support for an indexer method to the custom collection (`Garage`) developed in Chapter 8. Observe the following usage:

```
// Indexers allow you to access items in an arraylike fashion.
public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Indexers *****\n");

          // Assume the Garage type has an indexer method.
          Garage carLot = new Garage();

          // Add some cars to the garage using indexer.
          carLot[0] = new Car("FeeFee", 200);
          carLot[1] = new Car("Clunker", 90);
          carLot[2] = new Car("Zippy", 30);

          // Now obtain and display each item using indexer.
          for (int i = 0; i < 3; i++)
          {
              Console.WriteLine("Car number: {0}", i);
              Console.WriteLine("Name: {0}", carLot[i].PetName);
              Console.WriteLine("Max speed: {0}", carLot[i].CurrSpeed);
              Console.WriteLine();
          }
          Console.ReadLine();
     }
}
```

As you can see, indexers behave much like a custom collection supporting the `IEnumerator` and `IEnumerable` interfaces. The only major difference is that rather than accessing the contents using interface types, you are able to manipulate the internal collection of automobiles just like a standard array.

Now for the big question: How do you configure the `Garage` class (or any class/structure) to support this functionality? An indexer is represented as a slightly mangled C# property. In its simplest form, an indexer is created using the `this[]` syntax. Here is the relevant update to the `Garage` type:

```
// Add the indexer to the existing class definition.
public class Garage : IEnumerable // foreach iteration
{
...
     // Use ArrayList to contain the Car types.
     private ArrayList carArray = new ArrayList();

     // The indexer returns a Car based on a numerical index.
     public Car this[int pos]
     {
          // Note ArrayList has an indexer as well!
          get { return (Car)carArray[pos]; }
          set {carArray.Add(value);}
     }
}
```

Beyond the use of the `this` keyword, the indexer looks just like any other C# property declaration. Do be aware that indexers do not provide any array-like functionality beyond the use of the subscript operator. In other words, the object user cannot write code such as the following:

```
// Use ArrayList.Count property? Nope!
Console.WriteLine("Cars in stock: {0} ", carLot.Count);
```

To support this functionality, you would need to add your own `Count` property to the `Garage` type, and delegate accordingly:

```
public class Garage: IEnumerable
{
     ...
     // Containment/delegation in action once again.
     public int Count { get { return carArray.Count; } }
}
```

As you can gather, indexers are yet another form of syntactic sugar, given that this functionality can also be achieved using "normal" public methods. For example, if the `Garage` type did not support an indexer, you would be able to allow the outside world to interact with the internal array list using a named property or traditional accessor/mutator methods. Nevertheless, you when you support indexers on your custom collection types, they integrate well into the fabric of the .NET base class libraries.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleIndexer project is located under the Chapter 9 subdirectory.

A Variation of the Garage Indexer

The current `Garage` type defined an indexer that allowed the caller to identify subitems using a numerical value. Understand, however, that this is not a requirement of an indexer method. Assume you would rather contain the `Car` objects within a `System.Collections.Specialized.ListDictionary` rather than an `ArrayList`. Given that `ListDictionary` types allow access to the contained types using a key token (such as a string), you could configure the new `Garage` indexer as follows:

```
public class Garage : IEnumerable
{
     private ListDictionary carDictionary = new ListDictionary();

     // This indexer returns a Car based on a string index.
     public Car this[string name]
     {
         get { return (Car)carDictionary[name]; }
         set { carDictionary[name] = value; }
     }

     public int Length { get { return carDictionary.Count; } }

     public IEnumerator GetEnumerator()
     { return carDictionary.GetEnumerator(); }
}
```

The caller would now be able to interact with the internal cars as shown here:

```
public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Indexers *****\n");
          Garage carLot = new Garage();
```

```
            // Add named cars to garage.
            carLot["FeeFee"] = new Car("FeeFee", 200, 0);
            carLot["Clunker"] = new Car("Clunker", 90, 0);
            carLot["Zippy"] = new Car("Zippy", 30, 0);

            // Now get Zippy.
            Car zippy = carLot["Zippy"];
            Console.WriteLine("{0} is going {1} MPH",
                 zippy.PetName, zippy.CurrSpeed);
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
}
```

Understand that indexers may be overloaded. Thus, if it made sense to allow the caller to access subitems using a numerical index *or* a string value, you might define multiple indexers for a single type.

■ **Source Cone** The StringIndexer project is located under the Chapter 9 subdirectory.

Internal Representation of Type Indexers

Now that you have seen a few variations on the C# indexer method, you may be wondering how indexers are represented in terms of CIL. If you were to open up the numerical indexer of the `Garage` type, you would find that the C# compiler has created a property named `Item`, which maps to the correct getter/setter methods:

```
property instance class SimpleIndexer.Car Item(int32)
{
  .get instance class SimpleIndexer.Car SimpleIndexer.Garage::get_Item(int32)
  .set instance void SimpleIndexer.Garage::set_Item(int32,
    class SimpleIndexer.Car)
} // end of property Garage::Item
```

The `get_Item()` and `set_Item()` methods are implemented like any other .NET property, for example:

```
method public hidebysig specialname instance class SimpleIndexer.Car
  get_Item(int32 pos) cil managed
{
   Code size       22 (0x16)
  .maxstack  2
  .locals init ([0] class SimpleIndexer.Car CS$1$0000)
  IL_0000:  ldarg.0
  IL_0001:  ldfld class [mscorlib]System.Collections.ArrayList
    SimpleIndexer.Garage::carArray
  IL_0006:  ldarg.1
  IL_0007:  callvirt instance object [mscorlib]
    System.Collections.ArrayList::get_Item(int32)
  IL_000c:  castclass SimpleIndexer.Car
  IL_0011:  stloc.0
  IL_0012:  br.s IL_0014
  IL_0014:  ldloc.0
  IL_0015:  ret
} // end of method Garage::get_Item
```

Indexers: Final Details

If you want to get really exotic, you can also create an indexer that takes multiple parameters. Assume you have a custom collection that stores subitems in a 2D array. If this is the case, you may configure an indexer method as follows:

```
public class SomeContainer
{
    private int[,] my2DintArray = new int[10, 10];

    public int this[int row, int column]
    {  /* get or set value from 2D array */  }
}
```

Finally, understand that indexers can be defined on a given .NET interface type to allow implementing types to provide a custom implementation. Such an interface is as follows:

```
public interface IEstablishSubObjects
{
    // This interface defines an indexer that returns
    // strings based on a numerical index.
   string this[int index] { get; set; }
}
```

So much for the topic of C# indexers. Next up, you'll examine a technique supported by some (but not all) .NET programming languages: operator overloading.

Understanding Operator Overloading

C#, like any programming language, has a canned set of tokens that are used to perform basic operations on intrinsic types. For example, you know that the + operator can be applied to two integers in order to yield a larger integer:

```
// The + operator with ints.
int a = 100;
int b = 240;
int c = a + b;  // c is now 340
```

Again, this is no major news flash, but have you ever stopped and noticed how the same + operator can be applied to most intrinsic C# data types? For example, consider this code:

```
// + operator with strings.
string s1 = "Hello";
string s2 = " world!";
string s3 = s1 + s2;  // s3 is now "Hello world!"
```

In essence, the + operator functions in unique ways based on the supplied data types (strings or integers in this case). When the + operator is applied to numerical types, the result is the summation of the operands. However, when the + operator is applied to string types, the result is string concatenation.

The C# language provides the capability for you to build custom classes and structures that also respond uniquely to the same set of basic tokens (such as the + operator). Be aware that you cannot overload each and every intrinsic C# operator. Table 9-1 outlines the "overloadability" of the core operators.

Table 9-1. *Valid Overloadable Operators*

C# Operator	Overloadability
+, –, !, ~, ++, – –, true, false	This set of unary operators can be overloaded.
+, –, *, /, %, &, |, ^, <<, >>	These binary operators can be overloaded.
==, !=, <, >, <=, >=	The comparison operators can be overloaded. C# will demand that "like" operators (i.e., < and >, <= and >=, = = and !=) are overloaded together.
[]	The [] operator cannot be overloaded. As you saw earlier in this chapter, however, the indexer construct provides the same functionality.
()	The () operator cannot be overloaded. As you will see later in this chapter, however, custom conversion methods provide the same functionality.
+=, -=, *=, /=, %=, &=, |=, ^=, <<=, >>=	Shorthand assignment operators cannot be overloaded; however, you receive them as a freebie when you overload the related binary operator.

Overloading Binary Operators

To illustrate the process of overloading binary operators, assume the following simple `Point` structure:

```
// Just a simple everyday C# struct.
public struct Point
{
     private int x, y;
     public Point(int xPos, int yPos)
     {
          x = xPos;
          y = yPos;
     }

     public override string ToString()
     {
          return string.Format("[{0}, {1}]", this.x, this.y);
     }
}
```

Now, logically speaking, it makes sense to add `Point`s together. On a related note, it may be helpful to subtract one `Point` from another. For example, you would like to be able to author the following code:

```
// Adding and subtracting two points.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Overloaded Operators *****\n");

     // Make two points.
     Point ptOne = new Point(100, 100);
     Point ptTwo = new Point(40, 40);
     Console.WriteLine("ptOne = {0}", ptOne);
     Console.WriteLine("ptTwo = {0}", ptTwo);

     // Add the points to make a bigger point?
     Console.WriteLine("ptOne + ptTwo: {0} ", ptOne + ptTwo);
```

```
    // Subtract the points to make a smaller point?
    Console.WriteLine("ptOne - ptTwo: {0} ", ptOne - ptTwo);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

To allow a custom type to respond uniquely to intrinsic operators, C# provides the `operator` keyword, which you can only use in conjunction with *static* methods. When you are overloading a binary operator (such as + and -), you will pass in two arguments that are the same type as the defining class (a `Point` in this example), as illustrated in the following code:

```
// A more intelligent Point type.
public struct Point
{
...
    // overloaded operator +
    public static Point operator + (Point p1, Point p2)
    { return new Point(p1.x + p2.x, p1.y + p2.y); }

    // overloaded operator -
    public static Point operator - (Point p1, Point p2)
    { return new Point(p1.x - p2.x, p1.y - p2.y); }
}
```

The logic behind operator + is simply to return a brand new `Point` based on the summation of the fields of the incoming `Point` parameters. Thus, when you write `pt1 + pt2`, under the hood you can envision the following hidden call to the static operator + method:

```
// p3 = Point.operator+ (p1, p2)
p3 = p1 + p2;
```

Likewise, `p1 – p2` maps to the following:

```
// p3 = Point.operator- (p1, p2)
p3 = p1 - p2;
```

And What of the += and –+ Operators?

If you are coming to C# from a C++ background, you may lament the loss of overloading the shorthand assignment operators (+=, -=, and so forth). Fear not. In terms of C#, the shorthand assignment operators are automatically simulated if a type overloads the related binary operator. Thus, given that the `Point` structure has already overloaded the + and - operators, you are able to write the following:

```
// Overloading binary operators results in a freebie shorthand operator.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Freebie +=
    Point ptThree = new Point(90, 5);
    Console.WriteLine("ptThree = {0}", ptThree);
    Console.WriteLine("ptThree += ptTwo: {0}", ptThree += ptTwo);

    // Freebie -=
    Point ptFour = new Point(0, 500);
    Console.WriteLine("ptFour = {0}", ptFour);
    Console.WriteLine("ptFour -= ptThree: {0}", ptFour -= ptThree);
}
```

Overloading Unary Operators

C# also allows you to overload various unary operators, such as ++ and --. When you overload a unary operator, you will also define a static method via the `operator` keyword; however in this case you will simply pass in a single parameter that is the same type as the defining class/structure. For example, if you were to update the `Point` with the following overloaded operators:

```
public struct Point
{
...
     // Add 1 to the incoming Point.
     public static Point operator ++(Point p1)
     { return new Point(p1.x+1, p1.y+1); }

     // Subtract 1 from the incoming Point.
     public static Point operator --(Point p1)
     { return new Point(p1.x-1, p1.y-1); }
}
```

you could increment and decrement `Point`'s `X` and `Y` values as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Applying the ++ and -- unary operators to a Point.
     Console.WriteLine("++ptFive = {0}", ++ptFive);
     Console.WriteLine("--ptFive = {0}", --ptFive);
}
```

Overloading Equality Operators

As you may recall from Chapter 3, `System.Object.Equals()` can be overridden to perform value-based (rather than referenced-based) comparisons between types. If you choose to override `Equals()` (and the often related `System.Object.GetHashCode()` method), it is trivial to overload the equality operators (== and !=). To illustrate, here is the updated `Point` type:

```
// This incarnation of Point also overloads the == and != operators.
public struct Point
{
...
     public override bool Equals(object o)
     {
          if(o is Point)
          {
               if( ((Point)o).x == this.x &&
                   ((Point)o).y == this.y)
                    return true;
          }
          return false;
     }

     public override int GetHashCode()
     {  return this.ToString().GetHashCode(); }

     // Now let's overload the == and != operators.
     public static bool operator ==(Point p1, Point p2)
     {  return p1.Equals(p2); }
```

```
    public static bool operator !=(Point p1, Point p2)
    {  return !p1.Equals(p2); }
}
```

Notice how the implementation of operator == and operator != simply makes a call to the overridden `Equals()` method to get the bulk of the work done. Given this, you can now exercise your `Point` class as follows:

```
// Make use of the overloaded equality operators.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    Console.WriteLine("ptOne == ptTwo : {0}", ptOne == ptTwo);
    Console.WriteLine("ptOne != ptTwo : {0}", ptOne != ptTwo);
}
```

As you can see, it is quite intuitive to compare two objects using the well-known == and != operators rather than making a call to `Object.Equals()`. If you do overload the equality operators for a given class, keep in mind that C# demands that if you override the == operator, you *must* also override the != operator (if you forget, the compiler will let you know).

Overloading Comparison Operators

In Chapter 7, you learned how to implement the `IComparable` interface in order to compare the relative relationship between two like objects. Additionally, you may also overload the comparison operators (<, >, <=, and >=) for the same class. Like the equality operators, C# demands that if you overload <, you must also overload >. The same holds true for the <= and >= operators. If the `Point` type overloaded these comparison operators, the object user could now compare `Point`s as follows:

```
// Using the overloaded < and > operators.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    Console.WriteLine("ptOne < ptTwo : {0}", ptOne < ptTwo);
    Console.WriteLine("ptOne > ptTwo : {0}", ptOne > ptTwo);
}
```

Assuming you have implemented the `IComparable` interface, overloading the comparison operators is trivial. Here is the updated class definition:

```
// Point is also comparable using the comparison operators.
public struct Point : IComparable
{
...
    public int CompareTo(object obj)
    {
        if (obj is Point)
        {
            Point p = (Point)obj;
            if (this.x > p.x && this.y > p.y)
                return 1;
            if (this.x < p.x && this.y < p.y)
                return -1;
            else
                return 0;
        }
```

```
        else
            throw new ArgumentException();
    }

    public static bool operator <(Point p1, Point p2)
    { return (p1.CompareTo(p2) < 0); }

    public static bool operator >(Point p1, Point p2)
    { return (p1.CompareTo(p2) > 0); }

    public static bool operator <=(Point p1, Point p2)
    { return (p1.CompareTo(p2) <= 0); }

    public static bool operator >=(Point p1, Point p2)
    { return (p1.CompareTo(p2) >= 0); }
}
```

The Internal Representation of Overloaded Operators

Like any C# programming element, overloaded operators are represented using specific CIL syntax. To begin examining what takes place behind the scenes, open the `OverloadedOps.exe` assembly using `ildasm.exe`. As you can see from Figure 9-1, the overloaded operators are internally expressed via hidden methods (e.g., `op_Addition()`, `op_Subtraction()`, `op_Equality()`, and so on).



Figure 9-1. *In terms of CIL, overloaded operators map to hidden methods.*

Now, if you were to examine the specific CIL instructions for the `op_Addition` method, you would find that the `specialname` method decoration has also been inserted by `csc.exe`:

```
.method public hidebysig specialname static
        valuetype OverloadedOps.Point
            op_Addition(valuetype OverloadedsOps.Point p1,
               valuetype OverloadedOps.Point p2) cil managed
{
   ...
}
```

The truth of the matter is that any operator that you may overload equates to a specially named method in terms of CIL. Table 9-2 documents the C# operator-to-CIL mapping for the most common C# operators.

Table 9-2. *C# Operator-to-CIL Special Name Road Map*

Intrinsic C# Operator	CIL Representation
--	op_Decrement()
++	op_Increment()
+	op_Addition()
-	op_Subtraction()
*	op_Multiply()
/	op_Division()
==	op_Equality()
>	op_GreaterThan()
<	op_LessThan()
!=	op_Inequality()
>=	op_GreaterThanOrEqual()
<=	op_LessThanOrEqual()
-=	op_SubtractionAssignment()
+=	op_AdditionAssignment()

Interacting with Overloaded Operators from Overloaded Operator–Challenged Languages

Understanding how overloaded operators are represented in CIL code is not simply interesting from an academic point of view. To understand the practical reason for this knowledge, recall that the capability to overload operators is *not* supported by every .NET-aware language. Given this, what would happen if you wanted to add two `Point` types together in an overloaded operator–challenged language?

One approach is to provide "normal" public members that perform the same task as the overloaded operators. For example, you could update the `Point` type with `Add()` and `Subtract()` methods, which leverage the work performed by the custom + and - operators:

```
// Exposing overloaded operator semantics using simple
// member functions.
public struct Point
{
...
     // Operator + via Add()
     public static Point Add (Point p1, Point p2)
     { return p1 + p2; }
```

```
    // Operator - via Subtract()
    public static Point Subtract (Point p1, Point p2)
    { return p1 - p2; }
}
```

With this, the `Point` type is able to expose the same functionality using whichever technique a given language demands. C# users can apply the + and - operators and/or call `Add()`/`Subtract()`:

```
// Use operator + or Add().
Console.WriteLine("ptOne + ptTwo: {0} ", ptOne + ptTwo);
Console.WriteLine("Point.Add(ptOne, ptTwo): {0} ", Point.Add(ptOne, ptTwo));

// Use operator - or Subtract().
Console.WriteLine("ptOne - ptTwo: {0} ", ptOne - ptTwo);
Console.WriteLine("Point.Subtract(ptOne, ptTwo): {0} ",
    Point.Subtract(ptOne, ptTwo));
```

Languages that cannot use overloaded operators can simply make due with the public static methods. As an alternative to providing duplicate functionality on the same type, understand that it is also possible to directly call the specially named methods from languages that lack overloaded operators.

Consider the initial release of the VB .NET programming language. If you were to build a VB .NET console application that references the `Point` type, you could add or subtract `Point` types using the CIL "special names," for example:

```
' Assume this VB .NET application has access to the Point type.
Module OverLoadedOpClient
    Sub Main()
        Dim p1 As Point
        p1.x = 200
        p1.y = 9

        Dim p2 As Point
        p2.x = 9
        p2.y = 983

        ' Not as clean as calling AddPoints(),
        ' but it gets the job done.
        Dim bigPoint = Point.op_Addition(p1, p2)
        Console.WriteLine("Big point is {0}", bigPoint)
    End Sub
End Module
```

As you can see, overloaded operator–challenged .NET programming languages are able to directly invoke the internal CIL methods as if they were "normal" methods. While it is not pretty, it works.

■ **Note** Do be aware that the current version of VB .NET (Visual Basic .NET 2005) supports operator overloading. However, for the (many) managed languages that do not support operator overloading, knowledge of CIL "special names" can prove helpful.

Final Thoughts Regarding Operator Overloading

As you have seen, C# provides the capability to build types that can respond uniquely to various intrinsic, well-known operators. Now, before you go and retrofit all your classes to support such behavior, you must be sure that the operator(s) you are about to overload make some sort of logical sense in the world at large.

For example, let's say you overloaded the multiplication operator for the `Engine` class. What exactly would it mean to multiply two `Engine` objects? Not much. Overloading operators is generally only useful when you're building utility types. Strings, points, rectangles, fractions, and hexagons make good candidates for operator overloading. People, managers, cars, headphones, and baseball hats do not. As a rule of thumb, if an overloaded operator makes it *harder* for the user to understand a type's functionality, don't do it. Use this feature wisely.

■ **Source Code** The OverloadedOps project is located under the Chapter 9 subdirectory.

Understanding Custom Type Conversions

Let's now examine a topic closely related to operator overloading: custom type conversions. To set the stage for the discussion to follow, let's quickly review the notion of explicit and implicit conversions between numerical data and related class types.

Recall: Numerical Conversions

In terms of the intrinsic numerical types (`sbyte`, `int`, `float`, etc.), an *explicit conversion* is required when you attempt to store a larger value in a smaller container, as this may result in a loss of data. Basically, this is your way to tell the compiler, "Leave me alone, I know what I am trying to do." Conversely, an *implicit conversion* happens automatically when you attempt to place a smaller type in a destination type that will not result in a loss of data:

```
static void Main()
{
     int a = 123;
     long b = a;          // Implicit conversion from int to long
     int c = (int) b;     // Explicit conversion from long to int
}
```

Recall: Conversions Among Related Class Types

As shown in Chapter 4, class types may be related by classical inheritance (the "is-a" relationship). In this case, the C# conversion process allows you to cast up and down the class hierarchy. For example, a derived class can always be implicitly cast into a given base type. However, if you wish to store a base class type in a derived variable, you must perform an explicit cast:

```
// Two related class types.
class Base{}
class Derived : Base{}

class Program
{
     static void Main()
     {
```

```
            // Implicit cast between derived to base.
            Base myBaseType;
            myBaseType = new Derived();

            // Must explicitly cast to store base reference
            // in derived type.
            Derived myDerivedType = (Derived)myBaseType;
        }
}
```

This explicit cast works due to the fact that the `Base` and `Derived` classes are related by classical inheritance. However, what if you have two class types in *different hierarchies* that require conversions? Given that they are not related by classical inheritance, explicit casting offers no help.

On a related note, consider value types. Assume you have two .NET structures named `Square` and `Rectangle`. Given that structures cannot leverage classic inheritance, you have no natural way to cast between these seemingly related types (assuming it made sense to do so).

While you could build helper methods in the structures (such as `Rectangle.ToSquare()`), C# allows you to build custom conversion routines that allow your types to respond to the `()` operator. Therefore, if you configured the `Square` type correctly, you would be able to use the following syntax to explicitly convert between these structure types:

```
// Convert a Rectangle to a Square.
Rectangle rect;
rect.Width = 3;
rect.Height = 10;
Square sq = (Square)rect;
```

Creating Custom Conversion Routines

C# provides two keywords, `explicit` and `implicit`, that you can use to control how your types respond during an attempted conversion. Assume you have the following structure definitions:

```
public struct Rectangle
{
    // Public for ease of use;
    // however, feel free to encapsulate with properties.
    public int Width, Height;

    public void Draw()
    { Console.WriteLine("Drawing a rect.");}

    public override string ToString()
    {
        return string.Format("[Width = {0}; Height = {1}]",
            Width, Height);
    }
}

public struct Square
{
    public int Length;

    public void Draw()
    { Console.WriteLine("Drawing a square.");}
```

```
    public override string ToString()
    { return string.Format("[Length = {0}]", Length); }

    // Rectangles can be explicitly converted
    // into Squares.
    public static explicit operator Square(Rectangle r)
    {
        Square s;
        s.Length = r.Width;
        return s;
    }
}
```

Notice that this iteration of the `Rectangle` type defines an explicit conversion operator. Like the process of overloading an operator, conversion routines make use of the C# `operator` keyword (in conjunction with the `explicit` or `implicit` keyword) and must be defined as static. The incoming parameter is the entity you are converting *from*, while the return value is the entity you are converting *to*:

```
public static explicit operator Square(Rectangle r)
{...}
```

In any case, the assumption is that a square (being a geometric pattern in which all sides are of equal length) can be obtained from the width of a rectangle. Thus, you are free to convert a `Rectangle` into a `Square` as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Custom Conversions *****\n");

     // Create a 5 * 10 Rectangle.
     Rectangle rect;
     rect.Width = 10;
     rect.Height = 5;
     Console.WriteLine("rect = {0}", rect);

     // Convert Rectangle to a 10 * 10 Square.
     Square sq = (Square)rect;
     Console.WriteLine("sq = {0}", sq);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

While it may not be all that helpful to convert a `Rectangle` into a `Square` within the same scope, assume you have a function that has been prototyped to take `Square` types.

```
// This method requires a Square type.
private static void DrawSquare(Square sq)
{
     sq.Draw();
}
```

Using your explicit conversion operation, you can safely pass in `Square` types for processing:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Convert Rectangle to Square to invoke method.
     DrawSquare((Square)rect);
}
```

Additional Explicit Conversions for the Square Type

Now that you can explicitly convert `Rectangles` into `Squares`, let's examine a few additional explicit conversions. Given that a square is symmetrical on each side, it might be helpful to provide an explicit conversion routine that allows the caller to cast from a `System.Int32` type into a `Square` (which, of course, will have a side length equal to the incoming integer). Likewise, what if you were to update `Square` such that the caller can cast *from* a `Square` into a `System.Int32`? Here is the calling logic:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Converting a System.Int32 to a Square.
     Square sq2 = (Square)90;
     Console.WriteLine("sq2 = {0}", sq2);

     // Converting a Square to a System.Int32.
     int side = (int)sq2;
     Console.WriteLine("Side length of sq2 = {0}", side);
}
```

And here is the update to the `Square` type:

```
public struct Square
{
...
    public static explicit operator Square(int sideLength)
    {
        Square newSq;
        newSq.Length = sideLength;
        return newSq;
    }

    public static explicit operator int (Square s)
    {return s.Length;}
}
```

Wild, huh? To be honest, converting from a `Square` into a `System.Int32` may not be the most intuitive (or useful) operation. However, this does point out a very important fact regarding custom conversion routines: the compiler does not care what you convert to or from, as long as you have written syntactically correct code. Thus, as with overloading operators, just because you can create an explicit cast operation for a given type does not mean you should. Typically, this technique will be most helpful when you're creating .NET structure types, given that they are unable to participate in classical inheritance (where casting comes for free).

Defining Implicit Conversion Routines

Thus far, you have created various custom *explicit* conversion operations. However, what about the following *implicit* conversion?

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Attempt to make an implicit cast?
     Square s3;
     s3.Length = 83;
     Rectangle rect2 = s3;
}
```

As you might expect, this code will not compile, given that you have not provided an implicit conversion routine for the `Rectangle` type. Now here is the catch: it is illegal to define explicit and implicit conversion functions on the same type, if they do not differ by their return type or parameter set. This might seem like a limitation; however, the second catch is that when a type defines an *implicit* conversion routine, it is legal for the caller to make use of the *explicit* cast syntax!

Confused? To clear things up, let's add an implicit conversion routine to the `Rectangle` structure using the C# `implicit` keyword (note that the following code assumes the width of the resulting `Rectangle` is computed by multiplying the side of the `Square` by 2):

```
public struct Rectangle
{
...
     public static implicit operator Rectangle(Square s)
     {
          Rectangle r;
          r.Height = s.Length;

          // Assume the length of the new Rectangle with
          // (Length x 2)
          r.Width = s.Length * 2;
          return r;
     }
}
```

With this update, you are now able to convert between types as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Implicit cast OK!
     Square s3;
     s3.Length= 83;
     Rectangle rect2 = s3;
     Console.WriteLine("rect2 = {0}", rect2);
     DrawSquare(s3);

     // Explicit cast syntax still OK!
     Square s4;
     s4.Length = 3;
     Rectangle rect3 = (Rectangle)s4;
     Console.WriteLine("rect3 = {0}", rect3);
...
}
```

Again, be aware that it is permissible to define explicit and implicit conversion routines for the same type as long as their signatures differ. Thus, you could update the `Square` as follows:

```
public struct Square
{
...
    // Can call as:
    // Square sq2 = (Square)90;
    // or as:
    // Square sq2 = 90;
    public static implicit operator Square(int sideLength)
    {
```

```
        Square newSq;
        newSq.Length = sideLength;
        return newSq;
    }

    // Must call as:
    // int side = (Square)mySquare;
    public static explicit operator int (Square s)
    { return s.Length; }
}
```

The Internal Representation of Custom Conversion Routines

Like overloaded operators, methods that are qualified with the `implicit` or `explicit` keywords have "special" names in terms of CIL: `op_Implicit` and `op_Explicit`, respectively (see Figure 9-2).

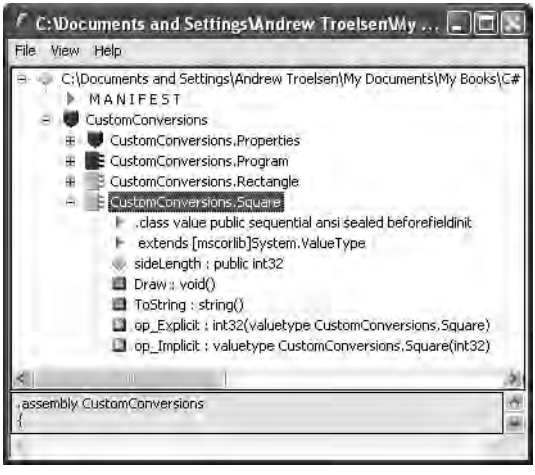


Figure 9-2. *CIL representation of user-defined conversion routines*

That wraps up our examination of defining custom conversion routines. As with overloaded operators, remember that this bit of syntax is simply a shorthand notation for "normal" member functions, and in this light it is always optional.

■ **Source Code** The CustomConversions project is located under the Chapter 9 subdirectory.

The Advanced Keywords of C#

To close this chapter, you'll examine some of the more esoteric C# keywords:

- `checked/unchecked`
- `unsafe/stackalloc/fixed/sizeof`

To start, let's check out how C# provides automatic detection of arithmetic overflow and underflow conditions using the `checked` and `unchecked` keywords.

The checked Keyword

As you are no doubt well aware, each numerical data type has a fixed upper and lower limit (which may be obtained programmatically using the `MaxValue` and `MinValue` properties). Now, when you are performing arithmetic operations on a specific type, it is very possible that you may accidentally *overflow* the maximum storage of the type (i.e., assign a value that is greater than the maximum value) or *underflow* the minimum storage of the type (i.e., assign a value that is less than the minimum value). To keep in step with the CLR, I will refer to both of these possibilities collectively as "overflow." (As you will see, checked overflow and underflow conditions result in a `System.OverflowException` type. There is no `System.UnderflowException` type in the base class libraries.)

To illustrate the issue, assume you have created two `System.Byte` types (a C# byte), each of which has been assigned a value that is safely below the maximum (255). If you were to add the values of these types (casting the resulting integer as a byte), you would assume that the result would be the exact sum of each member:

```
namespace CheckedUnchecked
{
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            // Overflow the max value of a System.Byte.
            Console.WriteLine("Max value of byte is {0}.", byte.MaxValue);
            Console.WriteLine("Min value of byte is {0}.", byte.MinValue);
            byte b1 = 100;
            byte b2 = 250;
            byte sum = (byte)(b1 + b2);

            // sum should hold the value 350, however...
            Console.WriteLine("sum = {0}", sum);
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

If you were to view the output of this application, you might be surprised to find that sum contains the value 94 (rather than the expected 350). The reason is simple. Given that a `System.Byte` can hold a value only between 0 and 255 (inclusive, for a grand total of 256 slots), `sum` now contains the overflow value (350 – 256 = 94). As you have just seen, if you take no corrective course of action, overflow occurs without exception. At times, this hidden overflow may cause no harm whatsoever in your project. Other times, this loss of data is completely unacceptable.

To handle overflow or underflow conditions in your application, you have two options. Your first choice is to leverage your wits and programming skills to handle all overflow conditions manually. Assuming you were indeed able to find each overflow condition in your program, you could resolve the previous overflow error as follows:

```
// Store sum in an integer to prevent overflow.
byte b1 = 100;
byte b2 = 250;
int sum = b1 + b2;
```

Of course, the problem with this technique is the simple fact that you *are* human, and even your best attempts may result in errors that have escaped your eyes. Given this, C# provides the `checked` keyword. When you wrap a statement (or a block of statements) within the scope of the `checked` keyword, the C# compiler emits specific CIL instructions that test for overflow conditions that may result when adding, multiplying, subtracting, or dividing two numerical data types. If an overflow has occurred, the runtime will throw a `System.OverflowException` type. Observe the following update:

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          // Overflow the max value of a System.Byte.
          Console.WriteLine("Max value of byte is {0}.", byte.MaxValue);
          byte b1 = 100;
          byte b2 = 250;

          try
          {
              byte sum = checked((byte)(b1 + b2));
              Console.WriteLine("sum = {0}", sum);
          }
          catch(OverflowException e)
          {  Console.WriteLine(e.Message); }
      }
}
```

Here, you wrap the addition of `b1` and `b2` within the scope of the `checked` keyword. If you wish to force overflow checking to occur over a block of code, you can interact with the `checked` keyword as follows:

```
try
{
    checked
    {
        byte sum = (byte)(b1 + b2);
        Console.WriteLine("sum = {0}", sum);
    }
}
catch(OverflowException e)
{
    Console.WriteLine(e.Message);
}
```

In either case, the code in question will be evaluated for possible overflow conditions automatically, which will trigger an overflow exception if encountered.

Setting Projectwide Overflow Checking

Now, if you are creating an application that should never allow silent overflow to occur, you may find yourself in the annoying position of wrapping numerous lines of code within the scope of the `checked` keyword. As an alternative, the C# compiler supports the `/checked` flag. When enabled, *all* of your arithmetic will be evaluated for overflow without the need to make use of the C# `checked` keyword. If overflow has been discovered, you will still receive a runtime `OverflowException`.

To enable this flag using Visual Studio 2005, open your project's property page and click the Advanced button on the Build tab. From the resulting dialog box, select the "Check for arithmetic overflow/underflow" check box (see Figure 9-3).

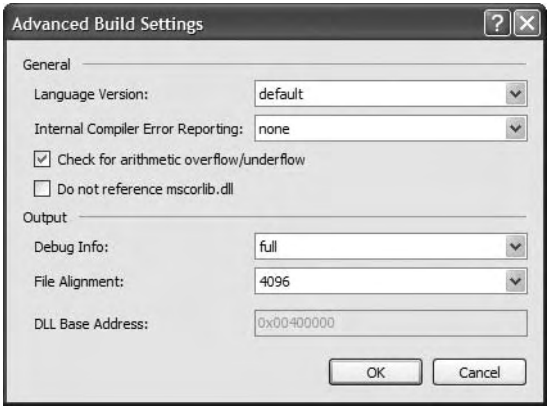


Figure 9-3. *Enabling Visual Studio 2005 overflow checking*

As you may guess, this setting can be very helpful when you're creating a debug build. Once all of the overflow exceptions have been squashed out of the code base, you're free to disable the `/checked` flag for subsequent builds (which will increase the runtime execution of your application).

The unchecked Keyword

Now, assuming you have enabled this projectwide setting, what are you to do if you have a block of code where silent overflow is acceptable? Given that the `/checked` flag will evaluate *all* arithmetic logic, the C# language provides the `unchecked` keyword to disable the throwing of `System.OverflowException` on a case-by-case basis. This keyword's use is identical to that of the `checked` keyword in that you can specify a single statement or a block of statements, for example:

```
// Assuming /checked is enabled,
// this block will not trigger
// a runtime exception.
unchecked
{
    byte sum = (byte)(b1 + b2);
    Console.WriteLine("sum = {0}", sum);
}
```

So, to summarize the C# `checked` and `unchecked` keywords, remember that the default behavior of the .NET runtime is to ignore arithmetic overflow. When you want to selectively handle discrete statements, make use of the `checked` keyword. If you wish to trap overflow errors throughout your application, enable the `/checked` flag. Finally, the `unchecked` keyword may be used if you have a block of code where overflow is acceptable (and thus should not trigger a runtime exception).

■ **Source Code** The CheckedUnchecked project can be found under the Chapter 9 subdirectory.

Working with Pointer Types

In Chapter 3, you learned that the .NET platform defines two major categories of data: value types and reference types. Truth be told, however, there is a third category: *pointer types*. To work with pointer types, we are provided with specific operators and keywords that allow us to bypass the CLR's memory management scheme and take matters into our own hands (see Table 9-3).

Table 9-3. *Pointer-centric C# Operators and Keywords*

Operator/Keyword	Meaning in Life
*	This operator is used to create a *pointer variable* (i.e., a variable that represents a direct location in memory). As in C(++), this same operator is used for pointer indirection.
&	This operator is used to obtain the address of a variable in memory.
->	This operator is used to access fields of a type that is represented by a pointer (the unsafe version of the C# dot operator).
[]	The [] operator (in an unsafe context) allows you to index the slot pointed to by a pointer variable (recall the interplay between a pointer variable and the [] operator in C(++)!).
++, --	In an unsafe context, the increment and decrement operators can be applied to pointer types.
+, -	In an unsafe context, the addition and subtraction operators can be applied to pointer types.
==, !=, <, >, <=, =>	In an unsafe context, the comparison and equality operators can be applied to pointer types.
`stackalloc`	In an unsafe context, the `stackalloc` keyword can be used to allocate C# arrays directly on the stack.
`fixed`	In an unsafe context, the `fixed` keyword can be used to temporarily fix a variable so that its address may be found.

Now, before we dig into the details, let me point out the fact that you will *seldom if ever* need to make use of pointer types. Although C# does allow you to drop down to the level of pointer manipulations, understand that the .NET runtime has absolutely no clue of your intentions. Thus, if you mismanage a pointer, you are the one in charge of dealing with the consequences. Given these warnings, when exactly would you need to work with pointer types? There are two common situations:

- You are looking to optimize select parts of your application by directly manipulating memory outside the management of the CLR.
- You are calling methods of a C-based `*.dll` or COM server that demand pointer types as parameters.

In the event that you do decide to make use of this C# language feature, you will be required to inform `csc.exe` of your intentions by enabling your project to support "unsafe code." To do so using the C# command-line compiler (`csc.exe`), simply supply the `/unsafe` flag as an argument. From Visual Studio 2005, you will need to access your project's Properties page and enable the Allow Unsafe Code option from the Build tab (see Figure 9-4).

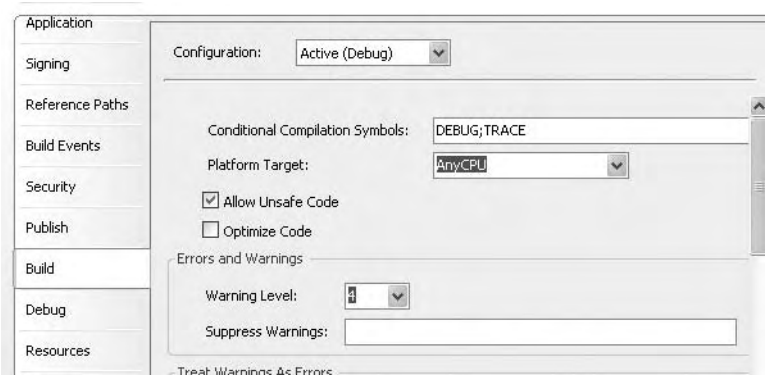


Figure 9-4. *Enabling unsafe code using Visual Studio 2005*

The unsafe Keyword

In the examples that follow, I'm assuming that you have some background in C(++) pointer manipulations. If this is not true in your case, don't sweat it. Again, writing unsafe code will not be a common task for a majority of .NET applications. When you wish to work with pointers in C#, you must specifically declare a block of "unsafe" code using the `unsafe` keyword (as you might guess, any code that is not marked with the `unsafe` keyword is considered "safe" automatically):

```
unsafe
{
    // Work with pointer types here!
}
```

In addition to declaring a scope of unsafe code, you are able to build structures, classes, type members, and parameters that are "unsafe." Here are a few examples to gnaw on:

```
// This entire structure is 'unsafe' and can
// be used only in an unsafe context.
public unsafe struct Node
{
   public int Value;
   public Node* Left;
   public Node* Right;
}

// This struct is safe, but the Node* members
// are not. Technically, you may access 'Value' from
// outside an unsafe context, but not 'Left' and 'Right'.
public struct Node
{
   public int Value;

   // These can be accessed only in an unsafe context!
   public unsafe Node* Left;
   public unsafe Node* Right;
}
```

Methods (static or instance level) may be marked as unsafe as well. For example, assume that you know a given static method will make use of pointer logic. To ensure that this method can be called only from an unsafe context, you could define the method as follows:

```
unsafe public static void SomeUnsafeCode()
{
     // Work with pointer types here!
}
```

This configuration demands that the caller invoke `SomeUnsafeCode()` as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     unsafe
     {
          SomeUnsafeCode();
     }
}
```

Conversely, if you would rather not force the caller to wrap the invocation within an unsafe context, you could remove the `unsafe` keyword from the `SomeUnsafeCode()` method signature and opt for the following:

```
public static void SomeUnsafeCode()
{
     unsafe
     {
          // Work with pointers here!
     }
}
```

which would simplify the call to this:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    SomeUnsafeCode();
}
```

Working with the * and & Operators

Once you have established an unsafe context, you are then free to build pointers to data types using the * operator and obtain the address of said pointer using the & operator. Using C#, the * operator is applied to the underlying type only, not as a prefix to each pointer variable name. For example, the following code declares two variables, both of type `int*` (a pointer to an integer):

```
// No! This is incorrect under C#!
int *pi, *pj;

// Yes! This is the way of C#.
int* pi, pj;
```

Consider the following example:

```
unsafe
{
     int myInt;

     // Define an int pointer, and
     // assign it the address of myInt.
     int* ptrToMyInt = &myInt;
```

```
    // Assign value of myInt using pointer indirection.
    *ptrToMyInt = 123;

    // Print some stats.
    Console.WriteLine("Value of myInt {0}", myInt);
    Console.WriteLine("Address of myInt {0:X}", (int)&ptrToMyInt);
}
```

An Unsafe (and Safe) Swap Function

Of course, declaring pointers to local variables simply to assign their value (as shown in the previous example) is never required and not altogether useful. To illustrate a more practical example of unsafe code, assume you wish to build a swap function using pointer arithmetic:

```
unsafe public static void UnsafeSwap(int* i, int* j)
{
    int temp = *i;
    *i = *j;
    *j = temp;
}
```

Very C-like, don't you think? However, given your work in Chapter 3, you should be aware that you could write the following safe version of your swap algorithm using the C# `ref` keyword:

```
public static void SafeSwap(ref int i, ref int j)
{
    int temp = i;
    i = j;
    j = temp;
}
```

The functionality of each method is identical, thus reinforcing the point that direct pointer manipulation is not a mandatory task under C#. Here is the calling logic:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Calling method with unsafe code *****");

    // Values for swap.
    int i = 10, j = 20;

    // Swap values 'safely'.
    Console.WriteLine("\n***** Safe swap *****");
    Console.WriteLine("Values before safe swap: i = {0}, j = {1}", i, j);
    SafeSwap(ref i, ref j);
    Console.WriteLine("Values after safe swap: i = {0}, j = {1}", i, j);

    // Swap values 'unsafely'.
    Console.WriteLine("\n***** Unsafe swap *****");
    Console.WriteLine("Values before unsafe swap: i = {0}, j = {1}", i, j);
    unsafe { UnsafeSwap(&i, &j); }
    Console.WriteLine("Values after unsafe swap: i = {0}, j = {1}", i, j);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Field Access via Pointers (the -> Operator)

Now assume that you have defined a `Point` structure and wish to declare a pointer to a `Point` type. Like C(++), when you wish to invoke methods or trigger fields of a pointer type, you will need to make use of the pointer-field access operator (`->`). As mentioned in Table 9-3, this is the unsafe version of the standard (safe) dot operator (`.`). In fact, using the pointer indirection operator (*), it is possible to dereference a pointer to (once again) apply the dot operator notation. Check out the following:

```
struct Point
{
     public int x;
     public int y;
     public override string ToString()
     { return string.Format("({0}, {1})", x, y);}
}

static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Access members via pointer.
     unsafe
     {
          Point point;
          Point* p = &point;
          p->x = 100;
          p->y = 200;
          Console.WriteLine(p->ToString());
     }

     // Access members via pointer indirection.
     unsafe
     {
          Point point;
          Point* p = &point;
          (*p).x = 100;
          (*p).y = 200;
          Console.WriteLine((*p).ToString());
     }
}
```

The stackalloc Keyword

In an unsafe context, you may need to declare a local variable that allocates memory directly from the call stack (and is therefore not subject to .NET garbage collection). To do so, C# provides the `stackalloc` keyword, which is the C# equivalent to the `_alloca` function of the C runtime library. Here is a simple example:

```
unsafe
{
     char* p = stackalloc char[256];
     for (int k = 0; k < 256; k++)
         p[k] = (char)k;
}
```

Pinning a Type via the fixed Keyword

As you saw in the previous example, allocating a chunk of memory within an unsafe context may be facilitated via the `stackalloc` keyword. By the very nature of this operation, the allocated memory is cleaned up as soon as the allocating method has returned (as the memory is acquired from the stack). However, assume a more complex example. During our examination of the -> operator, you created a value type named `Point`. Like all value types, the allocated memory is popped off the stack once the executing scope has terminated. For the sake of argument, assume `Point` was instead defined as a *reference* type:

```
class Point  // <= Now a class!
{
     public int x;
     public int y;
     public override string ToString()
     { return string.Format("({0}, {1})", x, y);}
}
```

As you are well aware, if the caller declares a variable of type `Point`, the memory is allocated on the garbage collected heap. The burning question then becomes, what if an unsafe context wishes to interact with this object (or any object on the heap)? Given that garbage collection can occur at any moment, imagine the pain of accessing the members of `Point` at the very point in time at which a sweep of the heap is under way. Theoretically, it is possible that the unsafe context is attempting to interact with a member that is no longer accessible or has been repositioned on the heap after surviving a generational sweep (which is an obvious problem).

To lock a reference type variable in memory from an unsafe context, C# provides the `fixed` keyword. The `fixed` statement sets a pointer to a managed type and "pins" that variable during the execution of statement. Without `fixed`, pointers to managed variables would be of little use, since garbage collection could relocate the variables unpredictably. (In fact, the C# compiler will not allow you to set a pointer to a managed variable except in a `fixed` statement.)

Thus, if you create a `Point` type (now redesigned as a class) and want to interact with its members, you must write the following code (or receive a compiler error):

```
unsafe public static void Main()
{
     Point pt = new Point();
     pt.x = 5;
     pt.y = 6;

     // pin pt in place so it will not
     // be moved or GC-ed.
     fixed (int* p = &pt.x)
     {
         // Use int* variable here!
     }

     // pt is now unpinned, and ready to be GC-ed.
     Console.WriteLine ("Point is: {0}", pt);
}
```

In a nutshell, the `fixed` keyword allows you to build a statement that locks a reference variable in memory, such that its address remains constant for the duration of the statement. To be sure, any time you interact with a reference type from within the context of unsafe code, pinning the reference is a must.

The sizeof Keyword

The final unsafe-centric C# keyword to consider is `sizeof`. As in C(++), the C# `sizeof` keyword is used to obtain the size in bytes for a value type (never a reference type), and it may only be used within an unsafe context. As you may imagine, this ability may prove helpful when you're interacting with unmanaged C-based APIs. Its usage is straightforward:

```
unsafe
{
    Console.WriteLine("The size of short is {0}.", sizeof(short));
    Console.WriteLine("The size of int is {0}.", sizeof(int));
    Console.WriteLine("The size of long is {0}.", sizeof(long));
}
```

As `sizeof` will evaluate the number of bytes for any `System.ValueType`-derived entity, you are able to obtain the size of custom structures as well. Assume you have defined the following `struct`:

```
struct MyValueType
{
     public short s;
     public int i;
     public long l;
}
```

You can now obtain its size as follows:

```
unsafe
{
    Console.WriteLine("The size of short is {0}.", sizeof(short));
    Console.WriteLine("The size of int is {0}.", sizeof(int));
    Console.WriteLine("The size of long is {0}.", sizeof(long));
    Console.WriteLine("The size of MyValueType is {0}.",
        sizeof(MyValueType));
}
```

■ **Source Code** The UnsafeCode project can be found under the Chapter 9 subdirectory.

C# Preprocessor Directives

Like many other languages in the C family, C# supports the use of various symbols that allow you to interact with the compilation process. Before examining various C# preprocessor directives, let's get our terminology correct. The term "C# preprocessor directive" is not entirely accurate. In reality, this term is used only for consistency with the C and C++ programming languages. In C#, there is no separate preprocessing step. Rather, preprocessing directives are processed as part of the lexical analysis phase of the compiler.

In any case, the syntax of the C# preprocessor directives is very similar to that of the other members of the C family, in that the directives are always prefixed with the pound sign (#). Table 9-4 defines some of the more commonly used directives (consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for complete details).

Table 9-4. *Common C# Preprocessor Directives*

Directives	Meaning in Life
`#region`, `#endregion`	Used to mark sections of collapsible source code
`#define`, `#undef`	Used to define and undefine conditional compilation symbols
`#if`, `#elif`, `#else`, `#endif`	Used to conditionally skip sections of source code (based on specified compilation symbols)

Specifying Code Regions

Perhaps some of the most useful of all preprocessor directives are `#region` and `#endregion`. Using these tags, you are able to specify a block of code that may be hidden from view and identified by a friendly textual marker. Use of regions can help keep lengthy `*.cs` files more manageable. For example, you could create one region for a type's constructors, another for type properties, and so forth:

```
class Car
{
    private string petName;
    private int currSp;

    #region Constructors
    public Car()
    { ... }
    public Car Car(int currSp, string petName)
    {...}
    #endregion

    #region Properties
    public int Speed
    { ... }
    public string Name
    {...}
    #endregion
}
```

When you place your mouse cursor over a collapsed region, you are provided with a snapshot of the code lurking behind (see Figure 9-5).

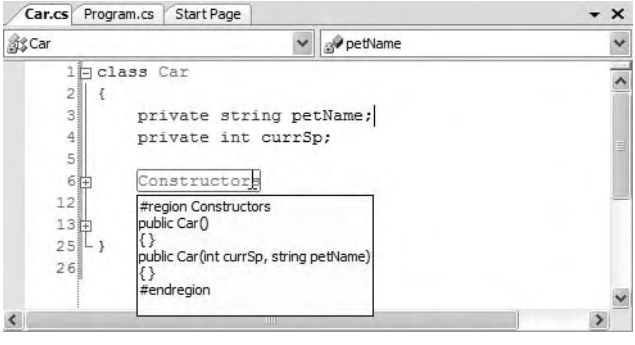


Figure 9-5. *Regions at work*

Conditional Code Compilation

The next batch of preprocessor directives (`#if`, `#elif`, `#else`, `#endif`) allows you to conditionally compile a block of code, based on predefined symbols. The classic use of these directives is to identify a block of code that is compiled only under a debug (rather than a release) build:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        // This code will only execute if the project is
        // compiled as a Debug build.
        #if DEBUG
        Console.WriteLine("App directory: {0}",
            Environment.CurrentDirectory);
        Console.WriteLine("Box: {0}",
            Environment.MachineName);
        Console.WriteLine("OS: {0}",
            Environment.OSVersion);
        Console.WriteLine(".NET Version: {0}",
            Environment.Version);
        #endif
    }
}
```

Here, you are checking for a symbol named `DEBUG`. If it is present, you dump out a number of interesting statistics using some static members of the `System.Environment` class. If the `DEBUG` symbol is not defined, the code placed between `#if` and `#endif` will not be compiled into the resulting assembly, and it will be effectively ignored.

By default, Visual Studio 2005 always defines a `DEBUG` symbol; however, this can be prevented by deselecting the "Define DEBUG constant" check box located under the Build tab of your project's Properties page. Assuming you did disable this autogenerated `DEBUG` symbol, you could now define this symbol on a file-by-file basis using the `#define` preprocessor directive:

```
#define DEBUG
using System;

namespace Preprocessor
{
    class ProcessMe
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            // Same code as before...
        }
    }
}
```

■ **Note** `#define` directives must be listed before anything else in a C# code file.

You are also able to define your own custom preprocessor symbols. For example, assume you have authored a C# class that should be compiled a bit differently under the Mono distribution of .NET (see Chapter 1). Using `#define`, you can define a symbol named `MONO_BUILD` on a file-by-file basis:

```
#define DEBUG
#define MONO_BUILD

using System;

namespace Preprocessor
{
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            #if MONO_BUILD
                Console.WriteLine("Compiling under Mono!");
            #else
                Console.WriteLine("Compiling under Microsoft .NET");
            #endif
        }
    }
}
```

To create a project-wide symbol, make use of the "Conditional compilation symbols" text box located on the Build tab of your project's Properties page (see Figure 9-6).

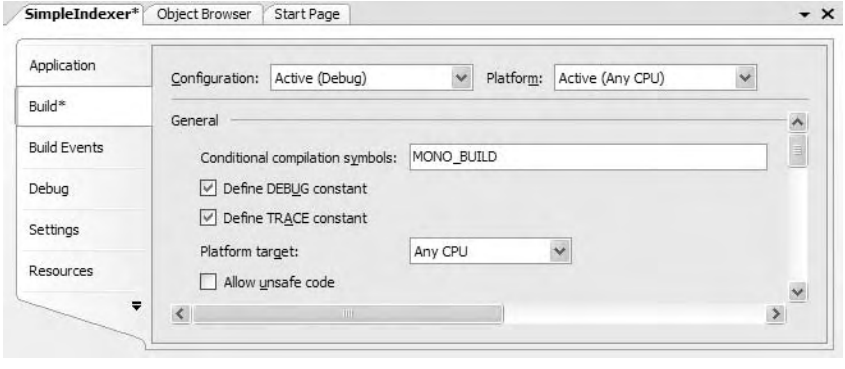


Figure 9-6. *Defining a projectwide preprocessor symbol*

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to deepen your understanding of the C# programming language. You began by investigating various advanced type construction techniques (indexer methods, overloaded operators, and custom conversion routines). You spent the remainder of this chapter examining a small set of lesser-known keywords (e.g., `sizeof`, `checked`, `unsafe`, and so forth), and during the process came to learn how to work with raw pointer types. As stated throughout the chapter's examination of pointer types, a vast majority of your C# applications will *never* need to make use of them.

CHAPTER 10

Understanding Generics

With the release of .NET 2.0, the C# programming language has been enhanced to support a new feature of the CTS termed *generics*. Simply put, generics provide a way for programmers to define "placeholders" (formally termed *type parameters*) for method arguments and type definitions, which are specified at the time of invoking the generic method or creating the generic type.

To illustrate this new language feature, this chapter begins with an examination of the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace. Once you've seen generic support within the base class libraries, in the remainder of this chapter you'll examine how you can build your own generic members, classes, structures, interfaces, and delegates.

Revisiting the Boxing, Unboxing, and System.Object Relationship

To understand the benefits provided by generics, it is helpful to understand the "issues" programmers had without them. As you recall from Chapter 3, the .NET platform supports automatic conversion between stack-allocated and heap-allocated memory through *boxing* and *unboxing*. At first glance, this may seem like a rather uneventful language feature that is more academic than practical. In reality, the (un)boxing process is very helpful in that it allows us to assume everything can be treated as a `System.Object`, while the CLR takes care of the memory-related details on our behalf.

To review the boxing process, assume you have created a `System.Collections.ArrayList` to hold numeric (stack-allocated) data. Recall that the members of `ArrayList` are all prototyped to receive and return `System.Object` types. However, rather than forcing programmers to manually wrap the stack-based integer in a related object wrapper, the runtime will automatically do so via a boxing operation:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Value types are automatically boxed when
     // passed to a member requesting an object.
     ArrayList myInts = new ArrayList();
     myInts.Add(10);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

If you wish to retrieve this value from the `ArrayList` object using the type indexer, you must unbox the heap-allocated object into a stack-allocated integer using a casting operation:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Value is now unboxed...then reboxed!
```

```
    Console.WriteLine("Value of your int: {0}",
        (int)myInts[0]);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

When the C# compiler transforms a boxing operation into terms of CIL code, you find the `box` opcode is used internally. Likewise, the unboxing operation is transformed into a CIL `unbox` operation. Here is the relevant CIL code for the previous `Main()` method (which can be viewed using `ildasm.exe`):

```
.method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
...
    box  [mscorlib]System.Int32
    callvirt  instance int32 [mscorlib]System.Collections.ArrayList::Add(object)
    pop
    ldstr  "Value of your int: {0}"
    ldloc.0
    ldc.i4.0
    callvirt  instance object [mscorlib]
       System.Collections.ArrayList::get_Item(int32)
    unbox  [mscorlib]System.Int32
    ldind.i4
    box  [mscorlib]System.Int32
    call  void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string, object)
...
}
```

Note that the stack-allocated `System.Int32` is boxed prior to the call to `ArrayList.Add()` in order to pass in the required `System.Object`. Also note that the `System.Object` is unboxed back into a `System.Int32` once retrieved from the `ArrayList` using the type indexer (which maps to the hidden `get_Item()` method), only to be *boxed again* when it is passed to the `Console.WriteLine()` method.

The Problem with (Un)Boxing Operations

Although boxing and unboxing are very convenient from a programmer's point of view, this simplified approach to stack/heap memory transfer comes with the baggage of performance issues and a lack of type safety. To understand the performance issues, ponder the steps that must occur to box and unbox a simple integer:

1. A new object must be allocated on the managed heap.
2. The value of the stack-based data must be transferred into that memory location.
3. When unboxed, the value stored on the heap-based object must be transferred back to the stack.
4. The now unused object on the heap will (eventually) be garbage collected.

Although the current `Main()` method won't cause a major bottleneck in terms of performance, you could certainly feel the impact if an `ArrayList` contained thousands of integers that are manipulated by your program on a somewhat regular basis.

Now consider the lack of type safety regarding unboxing operations. As you know, to unbox a value using the syntax of C#, you make use of the casting operator. However, the success or failure of a cast is not known until *runtime*. Therefore, if you attempt to unbox a value into the wrong data type, you receive an `InvalidCastException`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Ack!  Runtime exception!
     Console.WriteLine("Value of your int: {0}",
          (short)myInts[0]);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

In an ideal world, the C# compiler would be able to resolve illegal unboxing operations at compile time, rather than at runtime. On a related note, in a *really* ideal world, we could store sets of value types in a container that did not require boxing in the first place. .NET 2.0 generics are the solution to each of these issues. However, before we dive into the details of generics, let's see how programmers attempted to contend with these issues under .NET 1.x using strongly typed collections.

Type Safety and Strongly Typed Collections

In the world of .NET prior to version 2.0, programmers attempted to address type safety by building custom strongly typed collections. To illustrate, assume you wish to create a custom collection that can only contain objects of type `Person`:

```
public class Person
{
     // Made public for simplicity.
     public int currAge;
     public string fName, lName;

     public Person(){}
     public Person(string firstName, string lastName, int age)
     {
         currAge = age;
         fName = firstName;
         lName = lastName;
     }

     public override string ToString()
     {
         return string.Format("{0}, {1} is {2} years old",
             lName, fName, currAge);
     }
}
```

To build a person collection, you could define a `System.Collections.ArrayList` member variable within a class named `PeopleCollection` and configure all members to operate on strongly typed `Person` objects, rather than on generic `System.Objects`:

```
public class PeopleCollection : IEnumerable
{
    private ArrayList arPeople = new ArrayList();
    public PeopleCollection(){}

    // Cast for caller.
    public Person GetPerson(int pos)
    { return (Person)arPeople[pos]; }

    // Only insert Person types.
    public void AddPerson(Person p)
    { arPeople.Add(p); }
```

```
    public void ClearPeople()
    { arPeople.Clear(); }

    public int Count
    { get { return arPeople.Count; } }

    // Foreach enumeration support.
    IEnumerator IEnumerable.GetEnumerator()
    { return arPeople.GetEnumerator(); }
}
```

With these types defined, you are now assured of type safety, given that the C# compiler will be able to determine any attempt to insert an incompatible type:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Custom Person Collection *****\n");
     PeopleCollection myPeople = new PeopleCollection();
     myPeople.AddPerson(new Person("Homer", "Simpson", 40));
     myPeople.AddPerson(new Person("Marge", "Simpson", 38));
     myPeople.AddPerson(new Person("Lisa", "Simpson", 9));
     myPeople.AddPerson(new Person("Bart", "Simpson", 7));
     myPeople.AddPerson(new Person("Maggie", "Simpson", 2));

     // This would be a compile-time error!
     myPeople.AddPerson(new Car());

     foreach (Person p in myPeople)
         Console.WriteLine(p);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

While custom collections do ensure type safety, this approach leaves you in a position where you must create a (almost identical) custom collection for each type you wish to contain. Thus, if you need a custom collection that will be able to operate only on classes deriving form the `Car` base class, you need to build a very similar type:

```
public class CarCollection : IEnumerable
{
    private ArrayList arCars = new ArrayList();
    public CarCollection(){}

    // Cast for caller.
    public Car GetCar(int pos)
    { return (Car) arCars[pos]; }

    // Only insert Car types.
    public void AddCar(Car c)
    { arCars.Add(c); }

    public void ClearCars()
    { arCars.Clear(); }

    public int Count
    { get { return arCars.Count; } }

    // Foreach enumeration support.
    IEnumerator IEnumerable.GetEnumerator()
    { return arCars.GetEnumerator(); }
}
```

As you may know from firsthand experience, the process of creating multiple strongly typed collections to account for various types is not only labor intensive, but also a nightmare to maintain. Generic collections allow us to delay the specification of the contained type until the time of creation. Don't fret about the syntactic details just yet, however. Consider the following code, which makes use of a generic class named `System.Collections.Generic.List<>` to create two type-safe container objects:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Use the generic List type to hold only people.
     List<Person> morePeople = new List<Person>();
     morePeople.Add(new Person());

     // Use the generic List type to hold only cars.
     List<Car> moreCars = new List<Car>();

     // Compile-time error!
     moreCars.Add(new Person());
}
```

Boxing Issues and Strongly Typed Collections

Strongly typed collections are found throughout the .NET base class libraries and are very useful programming constructs. However, these custom containers do little to solve the issue of boxing penalties. Even if you were to create a custom collection named `IntCollection` that was constructed to operate only on `System.Int32` data types, you must allocate some type of object to hold the data (`System.Array`, `System.Collections.ArrayList`, etc.):

```
public class IntCollection : IEnumerable
{
    private ArrayList arInts = new ArrayList();
    public IntCollection() { }

    // Unbox for caller.
    public int GetInt(int pos)
    { return (int)arInts[pos]; }

    // Boxing operation!
    public void AddInt(int i)
    { arInts.Add(i); }

    public void ClearInts()
    { arInts.Clear(); }

    public int Count
    { get { return arInts.Count; } }

    IEnumerator IEnumerable.GetEnumerator()
    { return arInts.GetEnumerator(); }
}
```

Regardless of which type you may choose to hold the integers (`System.Array`, `System.Collections.ArrayList`, etc.), you cannot escape the boxing dilemma using .NET 1.1. As you might guess, generics come to the rescue again. The following code leverages the `System.Collections.Generic.List<>` type to create a container of integers that does *not* incur any boxing or unboxing penalties when inserting or obtaining the value type:

```
 static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // No boxing!
     List<int> myInts = new List<int>();
     myInts.Add(5);

     // No unboxing!
     int i = myInts[0];
}
```

Just to prove the point, the previous `Main()` method results in the following CIL code (note the lack of any `box` or `unbox` opcodes):

```
.method private hidebysig static void Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
     .entrypoint
     .maxstack  2
     .locals init ([0] class [mscorlib]System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'<int32>
          myInts, [1] int32 i)
     newobj instance void class
        [mscorlib]System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'<int32>::.ctor()
     stloc.0
     ldloc.0
     ldc.i4.5
     callvirt instance void class [mscorlib]
          System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'<int32>::Add(!0)
     nop
     ldloc.0
     ldc.i4.0
     callvirt instance !0 class [mscorlib]
          System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'<int32>::get_Item(int32)
     stloc.1
     ret
}
```

So now that you have a better feel for the role generics can play under .NET 2.0, you're ready to dig into the details. To begin, allow me to formally introduce the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace.

■ **Source Code** The CustomNonGenericCollection project is located under the Chapter 10 directory.

The System.Collections.Generic Namespace

Generic types are found sprinkled throughout the .NET 2.0 base class libraries; however, the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace is chock full of them (as its name implies). Like its nongeneric counterpart (`System.Collections`), the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace contains numerous class and interface types that allow you to contain subitems in a variety of containers. Not surprisingly, the generic interfaces mimic the corresponding nongeneric types in the `System.Collections` namespace:

- `ICollection<T>`
- `IComparer<T>`
- `IDictionary<K, V>`
- `IEnumerable<T>`
- `IEnumerator<T>`
- `IList<T>`

■ **Note** By convention, generic types specify their placeholders using uppercase letters. Although any letter (or word) will do, typically `T` is used to represent types, `K` is used for keys, and `V` is used for values.

The `System.Collections.Generic` namespace also defines a number of classes that implement many of these key interfaces. Table 10-1 describes the core class types of this namespace, the interfaces they implement, and any corresponding type in the `System.Collections` namespace.

Table 10-1. *Classes of* `System.Collections.Generic`

Generic Class	Nongeneric Counterpart in `System.Collections`	Meaning in Life
`Collection<T>`	`CollectionBase`	The basis for a generic collection
`Comparer<T>`	`Comparer`	Compares two generic objects for equality
`Dictionary<K, V>`	`Hashtable`	A generic collection of name/value pairs
`List<T>`	`ArrayList`	A dynamically resizable list of items
`Queue<T>`	`Queue`	A generic implementation of a first-in, first-out (FIFO) list
`SortedDictionary<K, V>`	`SortedList`	A generic implementation of a sorted set of name/value pairs
`Stack<T>`	`Stack`	A generic implementation of a last-in, first-out (LIFO) list
`LinkedList<T>`	N/A	A generic implementation of a doubly linked list
`ReadOnlyCollection<T>`	`ReadOnlyCollectionBase`	A generic implementation of a set of read-only items

The `System.Collections.Generic` namespace also defines a number of "helper" classes and structures that work in conjunction with a specific container. For example, the `LinkedListNode<T>` type represents a node within a generic `LinkedList<T>`, the `KeyNotFoundException` exception is raised when attempting to grab an item from a container using a nonexistent key, and so forth.

As you can see from Table 10-1, many of the generic collection classes have a nongeneric counterpart in the `System.Collections` namespace (some of which are identically named). Given that Chapter 7 illustrated how to work with these nongeneric types, I will not provide a detailed examination of each generic counterpart. Rather, I'll make use of `List<T>` to illustrate the process of working with generics. If you require details regarding other members of the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace, consult the .NET Framework 2.0 documentation.

Examining the List<T> Type

Like nongeneric classes, generic classes are heap-allocated objects, and therefore must be `new`-ed with any required constructor arguments. In addition, you are required to specify the type(s) to be substituted for the type parameter(s) defined by the generic type. For example, `System.Collections.Generic.List<T>` requires you to specify a single value that describes the type of item the `List<T>` will operate upon. Therefore, if you wish to create three `List<>` objects to contain integers and `SportsCar` and `Person` objects, you would write the following:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Create a List containing integers.
    List<int> myInts = new List<int>();

    // Create a List containing SportsCar objects.
    List<SportsCar> myCars = new List<SportsCar>();

    // Create a List containing Person objects.
    List<Person> myPeople = new List<Person>();
}
```

At this point, you might wonder what exactly becomes of the specified placeholder value. If you were to make use of the Visual Studio 2005 Code Definition View window (see Chapter 2), you will find that the placeholder `T` is used throughout the definition of the `List<T>` type. Here is a partial listing (note the items in **bold**):

```
// A partial listing of the List<T> type.
namespace System.Collections.Generic
{
    public class List<T> :
        IList<T>, ICollection<T>, IEnumerable<T>,
        IList, ICollection, IEnumerable
    {
...
        public void Add(T item);
        public IList<T> AsReadOnly();
        public int BinarySearch(T item);
        public bool Contains(T item);
        public void CopyTo(T[] array);
        public int FindIndex(System.Predicate<T> match);
        public T FindLast(System.Predicate<T> match);
        public bool Remove(T item);
        public int RemoveAll(System.Predicate<T> match);
        public T[] ToArray();
        public bool TrueForAll(System.Predicate<T> match);
        public T this[int index] { get; set; }
..
    }
}
```

When you create a `List<T>` specifying `SportsCar` types, it is as if the `List<T>` type was really defined as so:

```
namespace System.Collections.Generic
{
    public class List<SportsCar> :
        IList<SportsCar>, ICollection<SportsCar>, IEnumerable<SportsCar>,
        IList, ICollection, IEnumerable
    {
...
        public void Add(SportsCar item);
        public IList<SportsCar> AsReadOnly();
        public int BinarySearch(SportsCar item);
        public bool Contains(SportsCar item);
        public void CopyTo(SportsCar[] array);
        public int FindIndex(System.Predicate<SportsCar> match);
        public SportsCar FindLast(System.Predicate<SportsCar> match);
        public bool Remove(SportsCar item);
```

```
        public int RemoveAll(System.Predicate<SportsCar> match);
        public SportsCar [] ToArray();
        public bool TrueForAll(System.Predicate<SportsCar> match);
        public SportsCar this[int index] { get; set; }
..
    }
}
```

Of course, when you create a generic `List<T>`, the compiler does not literally create a brand-new implementation of the `List<T>` type. Rather, it will address only the members of the generic type you actually invoke. To solidify this point, assume you exercise a `List<T>` of `SportsCar` objects as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Exercise a List containing SportsCars
    List<SportsCar> myCars = new List<SportsCar>();
    myCars.Add(new SportsCar());
    Console.WriteLine("Your List contains {0} item(s).", myCars.Count);
}
```

If you examine the generated CIL code using `ildasm.exe`, you will find the following substitutions:

```
.method private hidebysig static void Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
     .entrypoint
     .maxstack  2
     .locals init ([0] class [mscorlib]System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'
          <class SportsCar> myCars)
     newobj instance void class [mscorlib]System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'
          <class SportsCar>::.ctor()
     stloc.0
     ldloc.0
     newobj instance void CollectionGenerics.SportsCar::.ctor()
     callvirt instance void class [mscorlib]System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'
          <class SportsCar>::Add(!0)
     nop
     ldstr "Your List contains {0} item(s)."
     ldloc.0
     callvirt  instance int32 class [mscorlib]System.Collections.Generic.'List`1'
          <class SportsCar>::get_Count()
     box [mscorlib]System.Int32
     call void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string, object)
     nop
     ret
}
```

Now that you've looked at the process of working with generic types provided by the base class libraries, in the remainder of this chapter you'll examine how to create your own generic methods, types, and collections.

Creating Generic Methods

To learn how to incorporate generics into your own projects, you'll begin with a simple example of a generic swap routine. The goal of this example is to build a swap method that can operate on any possible data type (value-based or reference-based) using a single type parameter. Due to the nature of swapping algorithms, the incoming parameters will be sent by reference (via the C# `ref` keyword). Here is the full implementation:

```
// This method will swap any two items.
// as specified by the type parameter <T>.
static void Swap<T>(ref T a, ref T b)
{
     Console.WriteLine("You sent the Swap() method a {0}",
          typeof(T));
     T temp;
     temp = a;
     a = b;
     b = temp;
}
```

Notice how a generic method is defined by specifying the type parameter after the method name but before the parameter list. Here, you're stating that the `Swap()` method can operate on any two parameters of type `<T>`. Just to spice things up a bit, you're printing out the type name of the supplied placeholder to the console using the C# `typeof()` operator. Now ponder the following `Main()` method that swaps integer and string types:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Generics *****\n");
    // Swap 2 ints.
    int a = 10, b = 90;
    Console.WriteLine("Before swap: {0}, {1}", a, b);
    Swap<int>(ref a, ref b);
    Console.WriteLine("After swap: {0}, {1}", a, b);
    Console.WriteLine();

    // Swap 2 strings.
    string s1 = "Hello", s2 = "There";
    Console.WriteLine("Before swap: {0} {1}!", s1, s2);
    Swap<string>(ref s1, ref s2);
    Console.WriteLine("After swap: {0} {1}!", s1, s2);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Omission of Type Parameters

When you invoke generic methods such as `Swap<T>`, you can optionally omit the type parameter if (and only if) the generic method requires arguments, as the compiler can infer the type parameter based on the member parameters. For example, you could swap two `System.Boolean` types as so:

```
// Compiler will infer System.Boolean.
bool b1 = true, b2 = false;
Console.WriteLine("Before swap: {0}, {1}", b1, b2);
Swap(ref b1, ref b2);
Console.WriteLine("After swap: {0}, {1}", b1, b2);
```

However, if you had another generic method named `DisplayBaseClass<T>` that did not take any incoming parameters, as follows:

```
static void DisplayBaseClass<T>()
{
     Console.WriteLine("Base class of {0} is: {1}.",
          typeof(T), typeof(T).BaseType);
}
```

you are required to supply the type parameter upon invocation:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Must supply type parameter if
     // the method does not take params.
     DisplayBaseClass<int>();
     DisplayBaseClass<string>();

     // Compiler error! No params?  Must supply placeholder!
     // DisplayBaseClass();
...
}
```

Figure 10-1 shows the current output of this application.

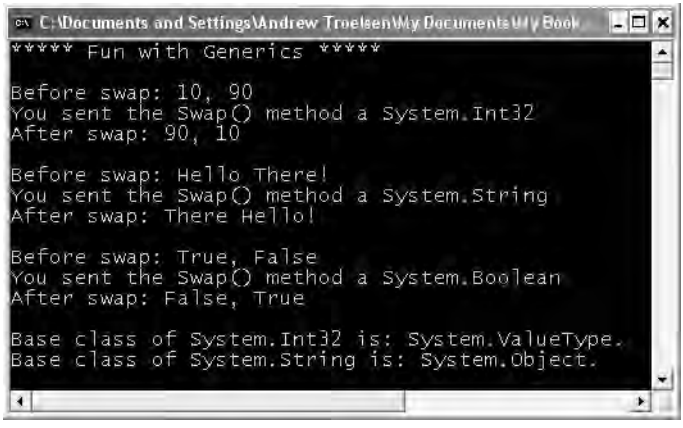

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Book
***** Fun with Generics *****
Before swap: 10, 90
You sent the Swap() method a System.Int32
After swap: 90, 10
Before swap: Hello There!
You sent the Swap() method a System.String
After swap: There Hello!
Before swap: True, False
You sent the Swap() method a System.Boolean
After swap: False, True
Base class of System.Int32 is: System.ValueType.
Base class of System.String is: System.Object.

Figure 10-1. *Generic methods in action*

Currently, the generic `Swap<T>` and `DisplayBaseClass<T>` methods have been defined within the application object (i.e., the type defining the `Main()` method). If you would rather define these members in a new class type (`MyHelperClass`), you are free to do so:

```
public class MyHelperClass
{
     public static void Swap<T>(ref T a, ref T b)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("You sent the Swap() method a {0}",
               typeof(T));
          T temp;
          temp = a;
          a = b;
          b = temp;
     }

     public static void DisplayBaseClass<T>()
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Base class of {0} is: {1}.",
               typeof(T), typeof(T).BaseType);
     }
}
```

Notice that the MyHelperClass type is not in itself generic; rather, it defines two generic methods. In any case, now that the Swap<T> and DisplayBaseClass<T> methods have been scoped within a new class type, you will need to specify the type's name when invoking either member, for example:

```
MyHelperClass.Swap<int>(ref a, ref b);
```

Finally, generic methods do not need to be static. If Swap<T> and DisplayBaseClass<T> were instance level, you would simply make an instance of MyHelperClass and invoke them off the object variable:

```
MyHelperClass c = new MyHelperClass();
c.Swap<int>(ref a, ref b);
```

Creating Generic Structures (or Classes)

Now that you understand how to define and invoke generic methods, let's turn our attention to the construction of a generic structure (the process of building a generic class is identical). Assume you have built a flexible Point structure that supports a single type parameter representing the underlying storage for the (x, y) coordinates. The caller would then be able to create Point<T> types as so:

```
// Point using ints.
Point<int> p = new Point<int>(10, 10);

// Point using double.
Point<double> p2 = new Point<double>(5.4, 3.3);
```

Here is the complete definition of Point<T>, with analysis to follow:

```
// A generic Point structure.
public struct Point<T>
{
    // Generic state date.
    private T xPos;
    private T yPos;

    // Generic constructor.
    public Point(T xVal, T yVal)
    {
        xPos = xVal;
        yPos = yVal;
    }

    // Generic properties.
    public T X
    {
        get { return xPos; }
        set { xPos = value; }
    }

    public T Y
    {
        get { return yPos; }
        set { yPos = value; }
    }

    public override string ToString()
```

```
    {
        return string.Format("[{0}, {1}]", xPos, yPos);
    }

    // Reset fields to the default value of the
    // type parameter.
    public void ResetPoint()
    {
        xPos = default(T);
        yPos = default(T);
    }
}
```

The default Keyword in Generic Code

As you can see, `Point<T>` leverages its type parameter in the definition of the field data, constructor arguments, and property definitions. Notice that in addition to overriding `ToString()`, `Point<T>` defines a method named `ResetPoint()` that makes use of some new syntax:

```
// The 'default' keyword is overloaded in C# 2005.
// when used with generics, it represents the default
// value of a type parameter.
public void ResetPoint()
{
     xPos = default(T);
     yPos = default(T);
}
```

Under C# 2005, the `default` keyword has been given a dual identity. In addition to its use within a `switch` construct, it can be used to set a type parameter to its default value. This is clearly helpful given that a generic type does not know the actual placeholders up front and therefore cannot safely assume what the default value will be. The defaults for a type parameter are as follows:

- Numeric values have a default value of 0.
- Reference types have a default value of null.
- Fields of a structure are set to 0 (for value types) or null (for reference types).

For `Point<T>`, you could simply set `xPos` and `yPos` to 0 directly, given that it is safe to assume the caller will supply only numerical data. However, by using the `default(T)` syntax, you increase the overall flexibility of the generic type. In any case, you can now exercise the methods of `Point<T>` as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Generics *****\n");

    // Point using ints.
    Point<int> p = new Point<int>(10, 10);
    Console.WriteLine("p.ToString()={0}", p.ToString());
    p.ResetPoint();
    Console.WriteLine("p.ToString()={0}", p.ToString());
    Console.WriteLine();

    // Point using double.
    Point<double> p2 = new Point<double>(5.4, 3.3);
    Console.WriteLine("p2.ToString()={0}", p2.ToString());
    p2.ResetPoint();
```

```
    Console.WriteLine("p2.ToString()={0}", p2.ToString());
    Console.WriteLine();

    // Swap 2 Points.
    Point<int> pointA = new Point<int>(50, 40);
    Point<int> pointB = new Point<int>(543, 1);
    Console.WriteLine("Before swap: {0}, {1}", pointA, pointB);
    Swap<Point<int>>(ref pointA, ref pointB);
    Console.WriteLine("After swap: {0}, {1}", pointA, pointB);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Figure 10-2 shows the output.

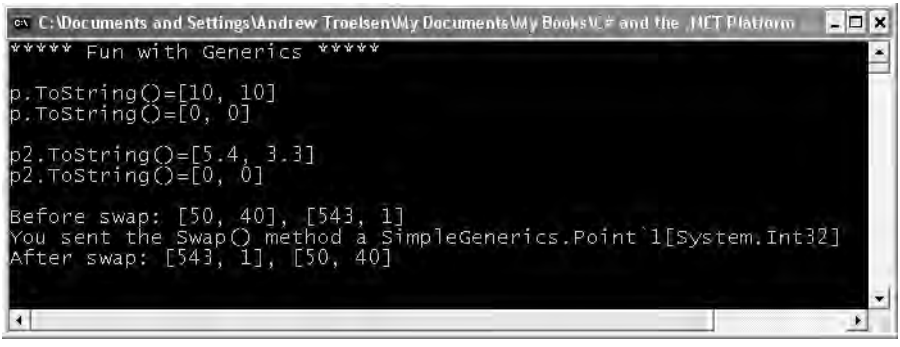

C:\Documents and Settings\Andrew Troelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Platform
****** Fun with Generics ******
p.ToString()=[10, 10]
p.ToString()=[0, 0]
p2.ToString()=[5.4, 3.3]
p2.ToString()=[0, 0]
Before swap: [50, 40], [543, 1]
You sent the Swap() method a SimpleGenerics.Point`1[System.Int32]
After swap: [543, 1], [50, 40]

Figure 10-2. *Using the generic* `Point` *type*

■ **Source Code** The SimpleGenerics project is located under the Chapter 10 subdirectory.

Creating a Custom Generic Collection

As you have seen, the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace provides numerous types that allow you to create type-safe and efficient containers. Given the set of available choices, the chances are quite good that you will not need to build custom collection types when programming with .NET 2.0. Nevertheless, to illustrate how you could build a stylized generic container, the next task is to build a generic collection class named `CarCollection<T>`.

Like the nongeneric `CarCollection` created earlier in this chapter, this iteration will leverage an existing collection type to hold the subitems (a `List<>` in this case). As well, you will support `foreach` iteration by implementing the generic `IEnumerable<>` interface. Do note that `IEnumerable<>` extends the nongeneric `IEnumerable` interface; therefore, the compiler expects you to implement *two* versions of the `GetEnumerator()` method. Here is the update:

```
public class CarCollection<T> : IEnumerable<T>
{
    private List<T> arCars = new List<T>();

    public T GetCar(int pos)
    { return arCars[pos]; }
```

```
    public void AddCar(T c)
    { arCars.Add(c); }

    public void ClearCars()
    { arCars.Clear(); }

    public int Count
    { get { return arCars.Count; } }

    // IEnumerable<T> extends IEnumerable, therefore
    // we need to implement both versions of GetEnumerator().
    IEnumerator<T> IEnumerable<T>.GetEnumerator()
    { return arCars.GetEnumerator(); }
    IEnumerator IEnumerable.GetEnumerator()
    { return arCars.GetEnumerator(); }
}
```

You could make use of this updated `CarCollection<T>` as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Custom Generic Collection *****\n");

    // Make a collection of Cars.
    CarCollection<Car> myCars = new CarCollection<Car>();
    myCars.AddCar(new Car("Rusty", 20));
    myCars.AddCar(new Car("Zippy", 90));

    foreach (Car c in myCars)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("PetName: {0}, Speed: {1}",
        c.PetName, c.Speed);
    }
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Here you are creating a `CarCollection<T>` type that contains only `Car` types. Again, you could achieve a similar end result if you make use of the `List<T>` type directly. The major benefit at this point is the fact that you are free to add unique methods to the `CarCollection` that delegate the request to the internal `List<T>`.

Constraining Type Parameters Using `where`

Currently, the `CarCollection<T>` class does not buy you much beyond uniquely named public methods. Furthermore, an object user could create an instance of `CarCollection<T>` and specify a completely unrelated type parameter:

```
// This is syntactically correct, but confusing at best...
CarCollection<int> myInts = new CarCollection<int>();
myInts.AddCar(5);
myInts.AddCar(11);
```

To illustrate another form of generic abuse, assume that you have now created two new classes (`SportsCar` and `MiniVan`) that derive from the `Car` type:

```
public class SportsCar : Car
{
     public SportsCar(string p, int s)
          : base(p, s){}
     // Assume additional SportsCar methods.
}

public class MiniVan : Car
{
     public MiniVan(string p, int s)
          : base(p, s){}
     // Assume additional MiniVan methods.
}
```

Given the laws of inheritance, it is permissible to add a `MiniVan` or `SportsCar` type directly into a `CarCollection<T>` created with a type parameter of `Car`:

```
// CarCollection<Car> can hold any type deriving from Car.
CarCollection<Car> myCars = new CarCollection<Car>();
myInts.AddCar(new MiniVan("Family Truckster", 55));
myInts.AddCar(new SportsCar("Crusher", 40));
```

Although this is syntactically correct, what if you wished to update `CarCollection<T>` with a new public method named `PrintPetName()`? This seems simple enough—just access the correct item in the `List<T>` and invoke the `PetName` property:

```
// Error! System.Object does not have a
// property named PetName.
public void PrintPetName(int pos)
{
     Console.WriteLine(arCars[pos].PetName);
}
```

However, this will not compile, given that the true identity of `T` is not yet known, and you cannot say for certain if the item in the `List<T>` type has a `PetName` property. When a type parameter is not constrained in any way (as is the case here), the generic type is said to be *unbound*. By design, unbound type parameters are assumed to have only the members of `System.Object` (which clearly does not provide a `PetName` property).

You may try to trick the compiler by casting the item returned from the `List<T>`'s indexer method into a strongly typed `Car`, and invoking `PetName` from the returned object:

```
// Error!
// Cannot convert type 'T' to 'Car'
public void PrintPetName(int pos)
{
     Console.WriteLine(((Car)arCars[pos]).PetName);
}
```

This again does not compile, given that the compiler does not yet know the value of the type parameter `<T>` and cannot guarantee the cast would be legal.

To address such issues, .NET generics may be defined with optional constraints using the `where` keyword. As of .NET 2.0, generics may be constrained in the ways listed in Table 10-2.

Table 10-2. *Possible Constraints for Generic Type Parameters*

Generic Constraint	Meaning in Life
`where T : struct`	The type parameter <T> must have `System.ValueType` in its chain of inheritance.
`where T : class`	The type parameter <T> must *not* have `System.ValueType` in its chain of inheritance (e.g., <T> must be a reference type).
`where T : new()`	The type parameter <T> must have a default constructor. This is very helpful if your generic type must create an instance of the type parameter, as you cannot assume the format of custom constructors. Note that this constraint must be listed last on a multiconstrained type.
`where T :` *`NameOfBaseClass`*	The type parameter <T> must be derived from the class specified by *`NameOfBaseClass`*.
`where T :` *`NameOfInterface`*	The type parameter <T> must implement the interface specified by *`NameOfInterface`*.

When constraints are applied using the `where` keyword, the constraint list is placed after the generic type's base class and interface list. By way of a few concrete examples, ponder the following constraints of a generic class named `MyGenericClass`:

```
// Contained items must have a default ctor.
public class MyGenericClass<T> where T : new()
{...}

// Contained items must be a class implementing IDrawable
// and support a default ctor.
public class MyGenericClass<T> where T : class, IDrawable, new()
{...}

// MyGenericClass derives from MyBase and implements ISomeInterface,
// while the contained items must be structures.
public class MyGenericClass<T> : MyBase, ISomeInterface where T : struct
{...}
```

On a related note, if you are building a generic type that specifies multiple type parameters, you can specify a unique set of constraints for each:

```
// <K> must have a default ctor, while <T> must
// implement the generic IComparable interface.
public class MyGenericClass<K, T> where K : new()
    where T : IComparable<T>
{...}
```

If you wish to update `CarCollection<T>` to ensure that only `Car`-derived types can be placed within it, you could write the following:

```
public class CarCollection<T> : IEnumerable<T> where T : Car
{
...
    public void PrintPetName(int pos)
    {
        // Because all subitems must be in the Car family,
        // we can now directly call the PetName property.
        Console.WriteLine(arCars[pos].PetName);
    }
}
```

Notice that once you constrain CarCollection<T> such that it can contain only Car-derived types, the implementation of PrintPetName() is straightforward, given that the compiler now assumes <T> is a Car-derived type. Furthermore, if the specified type parameter is not Car-compatible, you are issued a compiler error:

```
// Compiler error!
CarCollection<int> myInts = new CarCollection<int>();
```

Do be aware that generic methods can also leverage the where keyword. For example, if you wish to ensure that only System.ValueType-derived types are passed into the Swap() method created previously in this chapter, update the code accordingly:

```
// This method will swap any Value types.
static void Swap<T>(ref T a, ref T b) where T : struct
{
...
}
```

Understand that if you were to constrain the Swap() method in this manner, you would no longer be able to swap string types (as they are reference types).

The Lack of Operator Constraints

When you are creating generic methods, it may come as a surprise to you that it is a *compiler error* to apply any C# operators (+, -, *, ==, etc.) on the type parameters. As an example, I am sure you could imagine the usefulness of a class that can Add(), Subtract(), Multiply(), and Divide() generic types:

```
// Compiler error!  Cannot apply
// operators to type parameters!
public class BasicMath<T>
{
     public T Add(T arg1, T arg2)
     { return arg1 + arg2; }
     public T Subtract(T arg1, T arg2)
     { return arg1 - arg2; }
     public T Multiply(T arg1, T arg2)
     { return arg1 * arg2; }
     public T Divide(T arg1, T arg2)
     { return arg1 / arg2; }
}
```

Sadly, the preceding BasicMath<T> class will not compile. While this may seem like a major restriction, you need to remember that generics *are* generic. Of course, the System.Int32 type can work just fine with the binary operators of C#. However, for the sake of argument, if <T> were a custom class or structure type, the compiler cannot assume it has overloaded the +, -, *, and / operators. Ideally, C# would allow a generic type to be constrained by supported operators, for example:

```
// Illustrative code only!
// This is not legal code under C# 2.0.
public class BasicMath<T> where T : operator +, operator -,
     operator *, operator /
{
     public T Add(T arg1, T arg2)
     { return arg1 + arg2; }
     public T Subtract(T arg1, T arg2)
     { return arg1 - arg2; }
     public T Multiply(T arg1, T arg2)
```

```
    { return arg1 * arg2; }
    public T Divide(T arg1, T arg2)
    { return arg1 / arg2; }
}
```

Alas, operator constraints are not supported under C# 2005.

■ **Source Code** The CustomGenericCollection project is located under the Chapter 10 subdirectory.

Creating Generic Base Classes

Before we examine generic interfaces, it is worth pointing out that generic classes can be the base class to other classes, and can therefore define any number of virtual or abstract methods. However, the derived types must abide by a few rules to ensure that the nature of the generic abstraction flows through. First of all, if a nongeneric class extends a generic class, the derived class must specify a type parameter:

```
// Assume you have created a custom
// generic list class.
public class MyList<T>
{
    private List<T> listOfData = new List<T>();
}

// Concrete types must specify the type
// parameter when deriving from a
// generic base class.
public class MyStringList : MyList<string>
{}
```

Furthermore, if the generic base class defines generic virtual or abstract methods, the derived type must override the generic methods using the specified type parameter:

```
// A generic class with a virtual method.
public class MyList<T>
{
    private List<T> listOfData = new List<T>();
    public virtual void PrintList(T data) { }
}

public class MyStringList : MyList<string>
{
    // Must substitute the type parameter used in the
    // parent class in derived methods.
    public override void PrintList(string data) { }
}
```

If the derived type is generic as well, the child class can (optionally) reuse the type placeholder in its definition. Be aware, however, that any constraints placed on the base class must be honored by the derived type, for example:

```
// Note that we now have a default constructor constraint.
public class MyList<T> where T : new()
{
    private List<T> listOfData = new List<T>();
```

```
    public virtual void PrintList(T data) { }
}

// Derived type must honor constraints.
public class MyReadOnlyList<T> : MyList<T> where T : new()
{
    public override void PrintList(T data) { }
}
```

Now, unless you plan to build your own generics library, the chances that you will need to build generic class hierarchies are slim to none. Nevertheless, C# does support generic inheritance.

Creating Generic Interfaces

As you saw earlier in the chapter during the examination of the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace, generic interfaces are also permissible (e.g., `IEnumerable<T>`). You are, of course, free to define your own generic interfaces (with or without constraints). Assume you wish to define an interface that can perform binary operations on a generic type parameter:

```
public interface IBinaryOperations<T>
{
    T Add(T arg1, T arg2);
    T Subtract(T arg1, T arg2);
    T Multiply(T arg1, T arg2);
    T Divide(T arg1, T arg2);
}
```

Of course, interfaces are more or less useless until they are implemented by a class or structure. When you implement a generic interface, the supporting type specifies the placeholder type:

```
public class BasicMath : IBinaryOperations<int>
{
    public int Add(int arg1, int arg2)
    { return arg1 + arg2; }

    public int Subtract(int arg1, int arg2)
    { return arg1 - arg2; }

    public int Multiply(int arg1, int arg2)
    { return arg1 * arg2; }

    public int Divide(int arg1, int arg2)
    { return arg1 / arg2; }
}
```

At this point, you make use of `BasicMath` as you would expect:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Generic Interfaces *****\n");
    BasicMath m = new BasicMath();
    Console.WriteLine("1 + 1 = {0}", m.Add(1, 1));
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

If you would rather create a `BasicMath` class that operates on floating-point numbers, you could specify the type parameter as so:

```
public class BasicMath : IBinaryOperations<double>
{
     public double Add(double arg1, double arg2)
     { return arg1 + arg2; }
...
}
```

■ **Source Code** The GenericInterface project is located under the Chapter 10 subdirectory.

Creating Generic Delegates

Last but not least, .NET 2.0 does allow you to define generic delegate types. For example, assume you wish to define a delegate that can call any method returning `void` and receiving a single argument. If the argument in question may differ, you could model this using a type parameter. To illustrate, ponder the following code (notice the delegate targets are being registered using both "traditional" delegate syntax and method group conversion):

```
namespace GenericDelegate
{
     // This generic delegate can call any method
     // returning void and taking a single parameter.
     public delegate void MyGenericDelegate<T>(T arg);

     class Program
     {
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("***** Generic Delegates *****\n");

               // Register target with 'traditional' delegate syntax.
               MyGenericDelegate<string> strTarget =
                    new MyGenericDelegate<string>(StringTarget);
               strTarget("Some string data");

               // Register target using method group conversion.
               MyGenericDelegate<int> intTarget = IntTarget;
               intTarget(9);
               Console.ReadLine();
          }

          static void StringTarget(string arg)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("arg in uppercase is: {0}", arg.ToUpper());
          }

          static void IntTarget(int arg)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("++arg is: {0}", ++arg);
          }
     }
}
```

Notice that MyGenericDelegate<T> defines a single type parameter that represents the argument to pass to the delegate target. When creating an instance of this type, you are required to specify the value of the type parameter as well as the name of the method the delegate will invoke. Thus, if you specified a string type, you send a string value to the target method:

```
// Create an instance of MyGenericDelegate<T>
// with string as the type parameter.
MyGenericDelegate<string> strTarget =
     new MyGenericDelegate<string>(StringTarget);
strTarget("Some string data");
```

Given the format of the strTarget object, the StringTarget() method must now take a single string as a parameter:

```
static void StringTarget(string arg)
{
     Console.WriteLine("arg in uppercase is: {0}", arg.ToUpper());
}
```

Simulating Generic Delegates Under .NET 1.1

As you can see, generic delegates offer a more flexible way to specify the method to be invoked. Under .NET 1.1, you could achieve a similar end result using a generic System.Object:

```
public delegate void MyDelegate(object arg);
```

Although this allows you to send any type of data to a delegate target, you do so without type safety and with possible boxing penalties. For instance, assume you have created two instances of MyDelegate, both of which point to the same method, MyTarget. Note the boxing/unboxing penalties as well as the inherent lack of type safety:

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
...
          // Register target with 'traditional' delegate syntax.
          MyDelegate d = new MyDelegate(MyTarget);
          d("More string data");

          // Register target using method group conversion.
          MyDelegate d2 = MyTarget;
          d2(9);  // Boxing penalty.
...
     }

     // Due to a lack of type safety, we must
     // determine the underlying type before casting.
     static void MyTarget(object arg)
     {
          if(arg is int)
          {
               int i = (int)arg;  // Unboxing penalty.
               Console.WriteLine("++arg is: {0}", ++i);
          }
          if(arg is string)
```

```
        {
            string s = (string)arg;
            Console.WriteLine("arg in uppercase is: {0}", s.ToUpper());
        }
    }
}
```

When you send out a value type to the target site, the value is (of course) boxed and unboxed once received by the target method. As well, given that the incoming parameter could be anything at all, you must dynamically check the underlying type before casting. Using generic delegates, you can still obtain the desired flexibility without the "issues."

A Brief Word Regarding Nested Delegates

I'll wrap up this chapter by covering one final aspect regarding generic delegates. As you know, delegates may be nested within a class type to denote a tight association between the two reference types. If the nesting type is a generic, the nested delegate may leverage any type parameters in its definition:

```
// Nested generic delegates may access
// the type parameters of the nesting generic type.
public class MyList<T>
{
    private List<T> listOfData = new List<T>();
    public delegate void ListDelegate(T arg);
}
```

■ **Source Code** The GenericDelegate project is located under the Chapter 10 directory.

Summary

Generics can arguably be viewed as the major enhancement provided by C# 2005. As you have seen, a generic item allows you to specify "placeholders" (i.e., type parameters) that are specified at the time of creation (or invocation, in the case of generic methods). Essentially, generics provide a solution to the boxing and type-safety issues that plagued .NET 1.1 development.

While you will most often simply make use of the generic types provided in the .NET base class libraries, you are also able to create your own generic types. When you do so, you have the option of specifying any number of constraints to increase the level of type safety and ensure that you are performing operations on types of a "known quantity."

PART 3



Programming with .NET Assemblies

CHAPTER 11

Introducing .NET Assemblies

Each of the applications developed in this book's first ten chapters were along the lines of traditional "stand-alone" applications, given that all of your custom programming logic was contained within a single executable file (`*.exe`). However, one major aspect of the .NET platform is the notion of *binary reuse*, where applications make use of the types contained within various external assemblies (aka code libraries). The point of this chapter is to examine the core details of creating, deploying, and configuring .NET assemblies.

In this chapter, you'll first learn the distinction between single-file and multifile assemblies, as well as "private" and "shared" assemblies. Next, you'll examine exactly how the .NET runtime resolves the location of an assembly and come to understand the role of the Global Assembly Cache (GAC), application configuration files (`*.config` files), publisher policy assemblies, and the `System.Configuration` namespace.

The Role of .NET Assemblies

.NET applications are constructed by piecing together any number of *assemblies*. Simply put, an assembly is a versioned, self-describing binary file hosted by the CLR. Now, despite the fact that .NET assemblies have exactly the same file extensions (`*.exe` or `*.dll`) as previous Win32 binaries (including legacy COM servers), they have very little in common under the hood. Thus, to set the stage for the information to come, let's ponder some of the benefits provided by the assembly format.

Assemblies Promote Code Reuse

As you have been building your console applications over the previous chapters, it may have seemed that *all* of the applications' functionality was contained within the executable assembly you were constructing. In reality, your applications were leveraging numerous types contained within the always accessible .NET code library, `mscorlib.dll` (recall that the C# compiler references `mscorlib.dll` automatically), as well as `System.Windows.Forms.dll`.

As you may know, a *code library* (also termed a *class library*) is a `*.dll` that contains types intended to be used by external applications. When you are creating executable assemblies, you will no doubt be leveraging numerous system-supplied and custom code libraries as you create the application at hand. Do be aware, however, that a code library need not take a `*.dll` file extension. It is perfectly possible for an executable assembly to make use of types defined within an external executable file. In this light, a referenced `*.exe` can also be considered a "code library."

■ **Note** Before the release of Visual Studio 2005, the only way to reference an executable code library was using the `/reference` flag of the C# compiler. However, the Add Reference dialog box of Visual Studio 2005 now allows you to reference `*.exe` assemblies.

Regardless of how a code library is packaged, the .NET platform allows you to reuse types in a language-independent manner. For example, you could create a code library in C# and reuse that library in any other .NET programming language. It is possible to not only allocate types across languages, but derive from them as well. A base class defined in C# could be extended by a class authored in Visual Basic .NET. Interfaces defined in Pascal .NET can be implemented by structures defined in C#, and so forth. The point is that when you begin to break apart a single monolithic executable into numerous .NET assemblies, you achieve a *language-neutral* form of code reuse.

Assemblies Establish a Type Boundary

In Chapter 3, you learned about the formalities behind .NET namespaces. Recall that a type's *fully qualified name* is composed by prefixing the type's namespace (e.g., `System`) to its name (e.g., `Console`). Strictly speaking however, the assembly in which a type resides further establishes a type's identity. For example, if you have two uniquely named assemblies (say, `MyCars.dll` and `YourCars.dll`) that both define a namespace (`CarLibrary`) containing a class named `SportsCar`, they are considered unique types in the .NET universe.

Assemblies Are Versionable Units

.NET assemblies are assigned a four-part numerical version number of the form <*major*>.<*minor*>.<*build*>.<*revision*> (if you do not explicitly provide a version number using the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute, the assembly is automatically assigned a version of 0.0.0.0). This number, in conjunction with an optional *public key value,* allows multiple versions of the same assembly to coexist in harmony on a single machine. Formally speaking, assemblies that provide public key information are termed *strongly named*. As you will see in this chapter, using a strong name, the CLR is able to ensure that the correct version of an assembly is loaded on behalf of the calling client.

Assemblies Are Self-Describing

Assemblies are regarded as *self-describing* in part because they record every external assembly it must have access to in order to function correctly. Thus, if your assembly requires `System.Windows.Forms.dll` and `System.Drawing.dll`, they will be documented in the assembly's *manifest*. Recall from Chapter 1 that a manifest is a blob of metadata that describes the assembly itself (name, version, external assemblies, etc.).

In addition to manifest data, an assembly contains metadata that describes the composition (member names, implemented interfaces, base classes, constructors and so forth) of every contained type. Given that an assembly is documented in such vivid detail, the CLR does *not* consult the Win32 system registry to resolve its location (quite the radical departure from Microsoft's legacy COM programming model). As you will discover during this chapter, the CLR makes use of an entirely new scheme to resolve the location of external code libraries.

Assemblies Are Configurable

Assemblies can be deployed as "private" or "shared." Private assemblies reside in the same directory (or possibly a subdirectory) as the client application making use of them. Shared assemblies, on the

other hand, are libraries intended to be consumed by numerous applications on a single machine and are deployed to a specific directory termed the *Global Assembly Cache* (*GAC*).

Regardless of how you deploy your assemblies, you are free to author XML-based configuration files. Using these configuration files, the CLR can be instructed to "probe" for assemblies under a specific location, load a specific version of a referenced assembly for a particular client, or consult an arbitrary directory on your local machine, your network location, or a web-based URL. You'll learn a good deal more about XML configuration files throughout this chapter.

Understanding the Format of a .NET Assembly

Now that you've learned about several benefits provided by the .NET assembly, let's shift gears and get a better idea of how an assembly is composed under the hood. Structurally speaking, a .NET assembly (`*.dll` or `*.exe`) consists of the following elements:

- A Win32 file header
- A CLR file header
- CIL code
- Type metadata
- An assembly manifest
- Optional embedded resources

While the first two elements (the Win32 and CLR headers) are blocks of data that you can typically ignore, they do deserve some brief consideration. This being said, an overview of each element follows.

The Win32 File Header

The Win32 file header establishes the fact that the assembly can be loaded and manipulated by the Windows family of operating systems. This header data also identifies the kind of application (console-based, GUI-based, or `*.dll` code library) to be hosted by the Windows operating system. If you open a .NET assembly using the `dumpbin.exe` utility (via a .NET Framework 2.0 SDK command prompt) and specify the `/headers` flag, you can view an assembly's Win32 header information. Figure 11-1 shows (partial) Win32 header information for the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly you will build a bit later in this chapter.

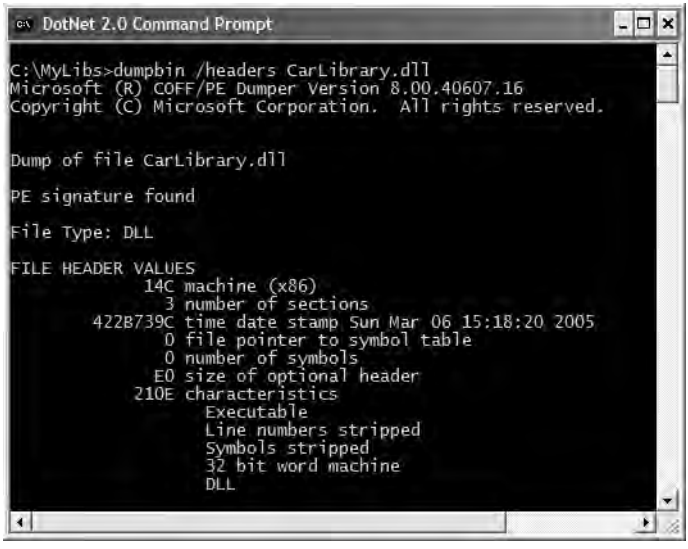


Figure 11-1. *An assembly's Win32 file header information*

The CLR File Header

The CLR header is a block of data that all .NET files must support (and do support, courtesy of the C# compiler) in order to be hosted by the CLR. In a nutshell, this header defines numerous flags that enable the runtime to understand the layout of the managed file. For example, flags exist that identify the location of the metadata and resources within the file, the version of the runtime the assembly was built against, the value of the (optional) public key, and so forth. If you supply the `/clrheader` flag to `dumpbin.exe`, you are presented with the internal CLR header information for a given .NET assembly, as shown in Figure 11-2.

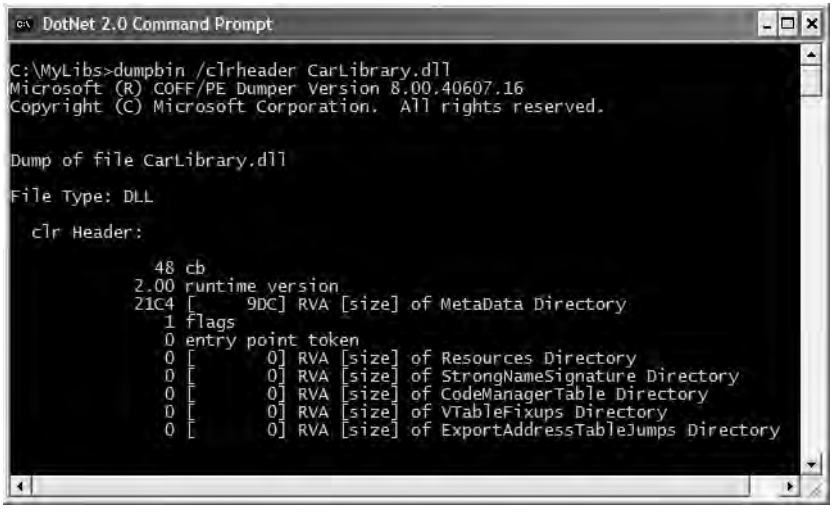

DotNet 2.0 Command Prompt
C:\MyLibs>dumpbin /clrheader CarLibrary.dll
Microsoft (R) COFF/PE Dumper Version 8.00.40607.16
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
Dump of file CarLibrary.dll
File Type: DLL
clr Header:
48 cb
2.00 runtime version
21C4 [9DC] RVA [size] of MetaData Directory
1 flags
0 entry point token
0 [0] RVA [size] of Resources Directory
0 [0] RVA [size] of StrongNameSignature Directory
0 [0] RVA [size] of CodeManagerTable Directory
0 [0] RVA [size] of VTableFixups Directory
0 [0] RVA [size] of ExportAddressTableJumps Directory

Figure 11-2. *An assembly's CLR file header information*

CLR header data is represented by an unmanaged C-style structure (IMAGE_COR20_HEADER) defined in the C-based header file, corhdr.h. For those who are interested, here is the layout of the structure in question:

```
// CLR 2.0 header structure.
typedef struct IMAGE_COR20_HEADER
{
    // Header versioning
    ULONG    cb;
    USHORT   MajorRuntimeVersion;
    USHORT   MinorRuntimeVersion;

    // Symbol table and startup information
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    MetaData;
    ULONG     Flags;
    ULONG     EntryPointToken;

    // Binding information
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    Resources;
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    StrongNameSignature;

    // Regular fixup and binding information
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    CodeManagerTable;
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    VTableFixups;
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    ExportAddressTableJumps;

    // Precompiled image info (internal use only - set to zero)
    IMAGE_DATA_DIRECTORY    ManagedNativeHeader;
} IMAGE_COR20_HEADER;
```

Again, as a .NET developer you will not need to concern yourself with the gory details of Win32 or CLR header information (unless perhaps you are building a new managed compiler!). Just understand that every .NET assembly contains this data, which is used behind the scenes by the .NET runtime and Win32 operating system.

CIL Code, Type Metadata, and the Assembly Manifest

At its core, an assembly contains CIL code, which as you recall is a platform- and CPU-agnostic intermediate language. At runtime, the internal CIL is compiled on the fly (using a just-in-time [JIT] compiler) to platform- and CPU-specific instructions. Given this architecture, .NET assemblies can indeed execute on a variety of architectures, devices, and operating systems. Although you can live a happy and productive life without understanding the details of the CIL programming language, Chapter 15 offers an introduction to the syntax and semantics of CIL.

An assembly also contains metadata that completely describes the format of the contained types as well as the format of external types referenced by this assembly. The .NET runtime uses this metadata to resolve the location of types (and their members) within the binary, lay out types in memory, and facilitate remote method invocations. You'll check out the details of the .NET metadata format in Chapter 12 during our examination of reflection services.

An assembly must also contain an associated *manifest* (also referred to as *assembly metadata*). The manifest documents each module within the assembly, establishes the version of the assembly, and also documents any *external* assemblies referenced by the current assembly (unlike legacy COM type libraries, which did not provide a way to document external dependencies). As you will see over the course of this chapter, the CLR makes extensive use of an assembly's manifest during the process of locating external assembly references.

■ **Note** Needless to say by this point in the book, when you wish to view an assembly's CIL code, type metadata, or manifest, `ildasm.exe` is the tool of choice. I will assume you will make extensive use of `ildasm.exe` as you work through the code examples in this chapter.

Optional Assembly Resources

Finally, a .NET assembly may contain any number of embedded resources such as application icons, image files, sound clips, or string tables. In fact, the .NET platform supports *satellite assemblies* that contain nothing but localized resources. This can be useful if you wish to partition your resources based on a specific culture (English, German, etc.) for the purposes of building international software. The topic of building satellite assemblies is outside the scope of this text; however, you *will* learn how to embed application resources into an assembly during our examination of GDI+ in Chapter 20.

Single-File and Multifile Assemblies

Technically speaking, an assembly can be composed of multiple *modules*. A module is really nothing more than a generic term for a valid .NET binary file. In most situations, an assembly is in fact composed of a single module. In this case, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the (logical) assembly and the underlying (physical) binary (hence the term *single-file assembly*).

Single-file assemblies contain all of the necessary elements (header information, CIL code, type metadata, manifest, and required resources) in a single `*.exe` or `*.dll` package. Figure 11-3 illustrates the composition of a single-file assembly.

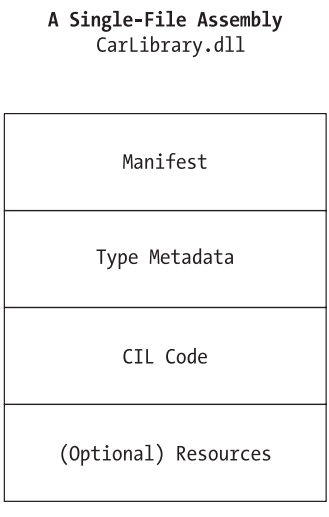


Figure 11-3. *A single-file assembly*

A multifile assembly, on the other hand, is a set of .NET `*.dll`s that are deployed and versioned as a single logic unit. Formally speaking, one of these `*.dll`s is termed the *primary module* and contains the assembly-level manifest (as well as any necessary CIL code, metadata, header information, and optional resources). The manifest of the primary module records each of the related `*.dll` files it is dependent upon.

As a naming convention, the secondary modules in a multifile assembly take a `*.netmodule` file extension; however, this is not a requirement of the CLR. Secondary `*.netmodules` also contain CIL code and type metadata, as well as a *module-level manifest*, which simply records the externally required assemblies of that specific module.

The major benefit of constructing multifile assemblies is that they provide a very efficient way to download content. For example, assume you have a machine that is referencing a remote multifile assembly composed of three modules, where the primary module is installed on the client. If the client requires a type within a secondary remote `*.netmodule`, the CLR will download the binary to the local machine on demand to a specific location termed the *download cache*. If each `*.netmodule` is 1MB, I'm sure you can see the benefit.

Another benefit of multifile assemblies is that they enable modules to be authored using multiple .NET programming languages (which is very helpful in larger corporations, where individual departments tend to favor a specific .NET language). Once each of the individual modules has been compiled, the modules can be logically "connected" into a logical assembly using tools such as the assembly linker (`al.exe`).

In any case, do understand that the modules that compose a multifile assembly are *not* literally linked together into a single (larger) file. Rather, multifile assemblies are only logically related by information contained in the primary module's manifest. Figure 11-4 illustrates a multifile assembly composed of three modules, each authored using a unique .NET programming language.

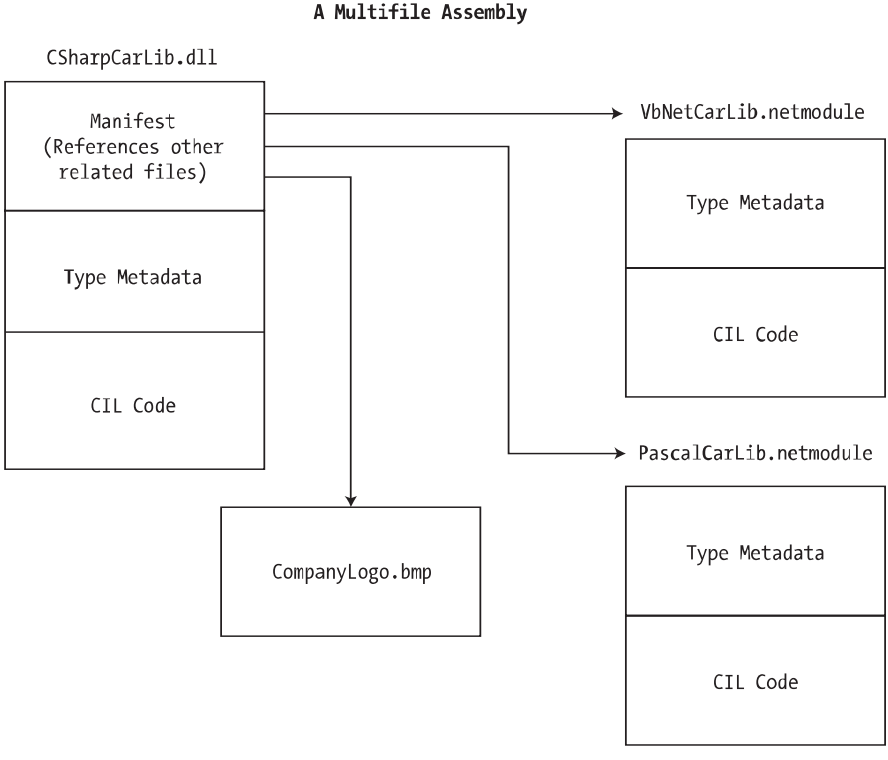


Figure 11-4. *The primary module records secondary modules in the assembly manifest*

At this point you (hopefully) have a better understanding about the internal composition of a .NET binary file. With this necessary preamble out of the way, we are ready to dig into the details of building and configuring a variety of code libraries.

Building and Consuming a Single-File Assembly

To begin the process of comprehending the world of .NET assemblies, you'll first create a single-file `*.dll` assembly (named CarLibrary) that contains a small set of public types. To build a code library using Visual Studio 2005, simply select the Class Library project workspace (see Figure 11-5).

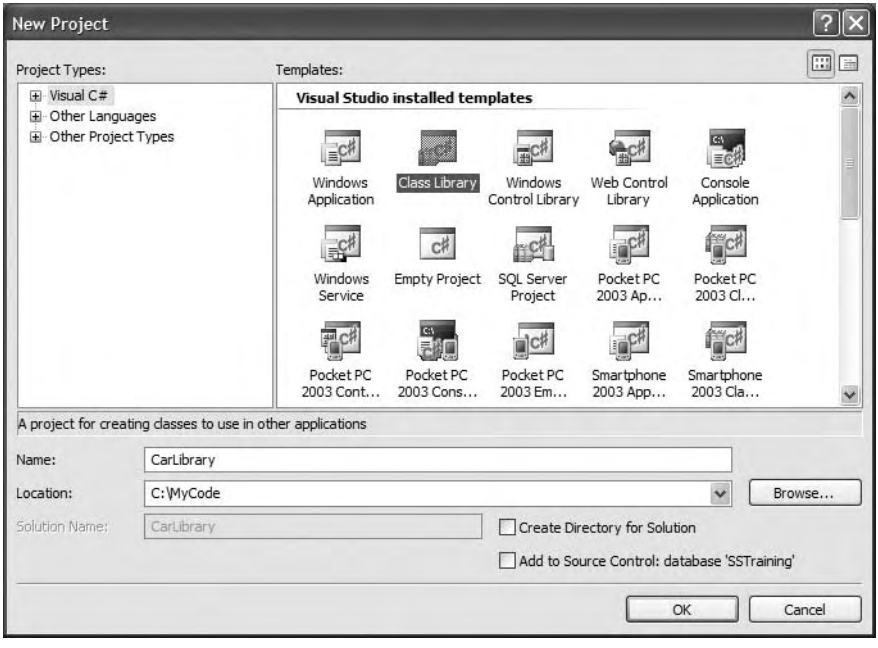


Figure 11-5. *Creating a C# code library*

The design of your automobile library begins with an abstract base class named `Car` that defines a number of protected data members exposed through custom properties. This class has a single abstract method named `TurboBoost()`, which makes use of a custom enumeration (`EngineState`) representing the current condition of the car's engine:

```
using System;

namespace CarLibrary
{
    // Represents the state of the engine.
    public enum EngineState
    { engineAlive, engineDead }

// The abstract base class in the hierarchy.
public abstract class Car
{
```

```
    protected string petName;
    protected short currSpeed;
    protected short maxSpeed;
    protected EngineState egnState = EngineState.engineAlive;

    public abstract void TurboBoost();

    public Car(){}
    public Car(string name, short max, short curr)
    {
        petName = name; maxSpeed = max; currSpeed = curr;
    }

    public string PetName
    {
        get {  return petName; }
        set {  petName = value; }
    }
    public short CurrSpeed
    {
        get {  return currSpeed; }
        set {  currSpeed = value; }
    }
    public short MaxSpeed
    {  get {  return maxSpeed; }  }
    public EngineState EngineState
    {  get {  return egnState; }  }
  }
}
```

Now assume that you have two direct descendents of the `Car` type named `MiniVan` and `SportsCar`. Each overrides the abstract `TurboBoost()` method in an appropriate manner.

```
using System;
using System.Windows.Forms;

namespace CarLibrary
{
    public class SportsCar : Car
    {
        public SportsCar(){ }
        public SportsCar(string name, short max, short curr)
            : base (name, max, curr){ }

        public override void TurboBoost()
        {
            MessageBox.Show("Ramming speed!", "Faster is better...");
        }
    }


    public class MiniVan : Car
    {
        public MiniVan(){ }
        public MiniVan(string name, short max, short curr)
            : base (name, max, curr){ }
```

```
        public override void TurboBoost()
        {
            // Minivans have poor turbo capabilities!
            egnState = EngineState.engineDead;
            MessageBox.Show("Time to call AAA", "Your car is dead");
        }
    }
}
```

Notice how each subclass implements `TurboBoost()` using the `MessageBox` class, which is defined in the `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assembly. For your assembly to make use of the types defined within this external assembly, the CarLibrary project must set a reference to this binary via the Add Reference dialog box (see Figure 11-6), which you can access through the Visual Studio 2005 Project ➤ Add Reference menu selection.

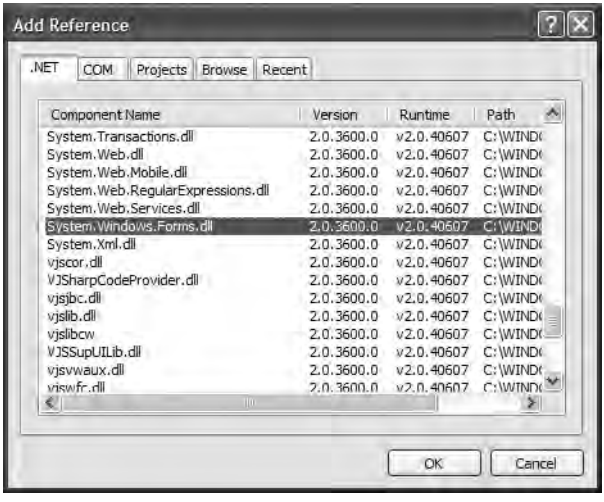


Figure 11-6. *Referencing external .NET assemblies begins here.*

It is *really* important to understand that the assemblies displayed in the .NET tab of the Add Reference dialog box do not represent each and every assembly on your machine. The Add Reference dialog box will *not* display your custom assemblies, and it does *not* display all assemblies located in the GAC. Rather, this dialog box simply presents a list of common assemblies that Visual Studio 2005 is preprogrammed to display. When you are building applications that require the use of an assembly not listed within the Add Reference dialog box, you need to click the Browse tab to manually navigate to the `*.dll` or `*.exe` in question.

■ **Note** Although it is technically possible to have your custom assemblies appear in the Add Reference dialog box's list by deploying a copy to C:\Program Files\Microsoft Visual Studio 8\Common7\IDE\PublicAssemblies, there is little benefit in doing so. The Recent tab keeps a running list of previously referenced assemblies.

Exploring the Manifest

Before making use of `CarLibrary.dll` from a client application, let's check out how the code library is composed under the hood. Assuming you have compiled this project, load `CarLibrary.dll` into `ildasm.exe` (see Figure 11-7).

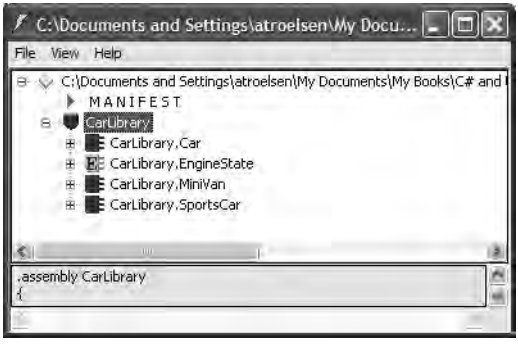


Figure 11-7. `CarLibrary.dll` *loaded into* `ildasm.exe`

Now, open the manifest of `CarLibrary.dll` by double-clicking the MANIFEST icon. The first code block encountered in a manifest is used to specify all external assemblies that are required by the current assembly to function correctly. As you recall, `CarLibrary.dll` made use of types within `mscorlib.dll` and `System.Windows.Forms.dll`, both of which are listed in the manifest using the `.assembly` extern token:

```
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
.assembly extern System.Windows.Forms
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
```

Here, each `.assembly` extern block is qualified by the `.publickeytoken` and `.ver` directives. The `.publickeytoken` instruction is present only if the assembly has been configured with a *strong name* (more details later in this chapter). The `.ver` token marks (of course) the numerical version identifier.

After cataloging each of the external references, you will find a number of `.custom` tokens that identify assembly-level attributes. If you examine the `AssemblyInfo.cs` file created by Visual Studio 2005, you will find these attributes represent basic characteristics about the assembly such as company name, trademark, and so forth (all of which are currently empty). Chapter 14 examines attributes in detail, so don't sweat the details at this point. Do be aware, however, that the attributes defined in `AssemblyInfo.cs` update the manifest with various `.custom` tokens, such as `[AssemblyTitle]`:

```
.assembly CarLibrary
{
...
  .custom instance void [mscorlib]
```

```
    System.Reflection.AssemblyTitleAttribute::.ctor(string) = ( 01 00 00 00 00 )
    .hash algorithm 0x00008004
  .ver 1:0:454:30104
}
.module CarLibrary.dll
```

Finally, you can also see that the `.assembly` token is used to mark the friendly name of your assembly (CarLibrary), while the `.module` token specifies the name of the module itself (`CarLibrary.dll`). The `.ver` token defines the version number assigned to this assembly, as specified by the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute within `AssemblyInfo.cs`. More details on assembly versioning later in this chapter, but note that the * wildcard character within the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute informs Visual Studio 2005 to increment the build and revision numbers during compilation.

Exploring the CIL

Recall that an assembly does not contain platform-specific instructions; rather, it contains platform-agnostic CIL. When the .NET runtime loads an assembly into memory, the underlying CIL is compiled (using the JIT compiler) into instructions that can be understood by the target platform. If you double-click the `TurboBoost()` method of the `SportsCar` class, `ildasm.exe` will open a new window showing the CIL instructions:

```
.method public hidebysig virtual instance void
        TurboBoost() cil managed
{
  // Code size        17 (0x11)
  .maxstack  2
  IL_0000:  ldstr      "Ramming speed!"
  IL_0005:  ldstr      "Faster is better..."
  IL_000a:  call       valuetype [System.Windows.Forms]
     System.Windows.Forms.DialogResult [System.Windows.Forms]
     System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox::Show(string, string)
  IL_000f:  pop
  IL_0010:  ret
} // end of method SportsCar::TurboBoost
```

Notice that the `.method` tag is used to identify a method defined by the `SportsCar` type. Member variables defined by a type are marked with the `.field` tag. Recall that the `Car` class defined a set of protected data, such as `currSpeed`:

```
.field family int16 currSpeed
```

Properties are marked with the `.property` tag. Here is the CIL describing the public `CurrSpeed` property (note that the read/write nature of a property is marked by `.get` and `.set` tags):

```
.property instance int16 CurrSpeed()
{
  .get instance int16 CarLibrary.Car::get_CurrSpeed()
  .set instance void CarLibrary.Car::set_CurrSpeed(int16)
} // end of property Car::CurrSpeed
```

Exploring the Type Metadata

Finally, if you now press Ctrl+M, `ildasm.exe` displays the metadata for each type within the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly (see Figure 11-8).

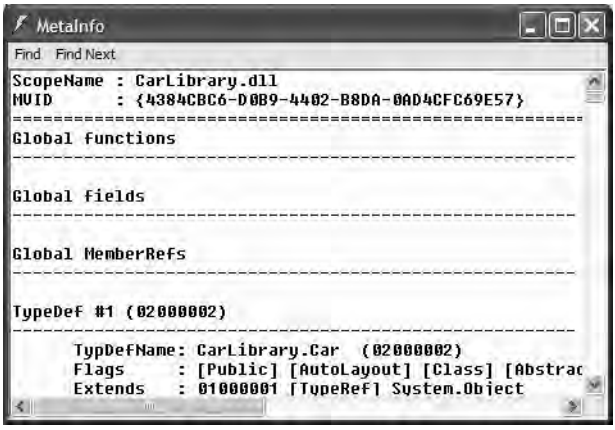


Figure 11-8. *Type metadata for the types within* `CarLibrary.dll`

Now that you have looked inside the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly, you can build some client applications.

■ **Source Code** The CarLibrary project is located under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

Building a C# Client Application

Because each of the CarLibrary types has been declared using the `public` keyword, other assemblies are able to make use of them. Recall that you may also define types using the C# `internal` keyword (in fact, this is the default C# access mode if you do not specifically define a type as `public`). Internal types can be used only by the assembly in which they are defined. External clients can neither see nor create internal types.

■ **Note** .NET 2.0 now provides a way to specify "friend assemblies" that allow internal types to be consumed by specific assemblies. Look up the `InternalsVisibleToAttribute` class in the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for details.

To consume these types, create a new C# console application project (CSharpCarClient). Once you have done so, set a reference to `CarLibrary.dll` using the Browse tab of the Add Reference dialog box (if you compiled `CarLibrary.dll` using Visual Studio 2005, your assembly is located under the \Bin\Debug subdirectory of the CarLibrary project folder). Once you click the OK button, Visual Studio 2005 responds by placing a copy of `CarLibrary.dll` into the \Bin\Debug folder of the CSharpCarClient project folder (see Figure 11-9).

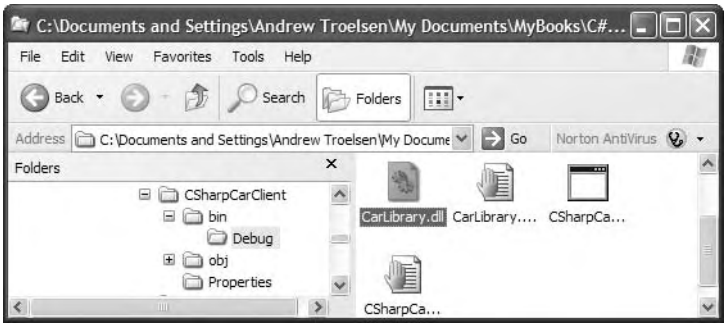


Figure 11-9. *Visual Studio 2005 copies private assemblies to the client's directory.*

At this point you can build your client application to make use of the external types. Update your initial C# file as so:

```
using System;

// Don't forget to 'use' the CarLibrary namespace!
using CarLibrary;

namespace CSharpCarClient
{
     public class CarClient
     {
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               // Make a sports car.
               SportsCar viper = new SportsCar("Viper", 240, 40);
               viper.TurboBoost();

               // Make a minivan.
               MiniVan mv = new MiniVan();
               mv.TurboBoost();
               Console.ReadLine();
          }
     }
}
```

This code looks just like the other applications developed thus far. The only point of interest is that the C# client application is now making use of types defined within a separate custom assembly. Go ahead and run your program. As you would expect, the execution of this program results in the display of various message boxes.

■ **Source Code** The CSharpCarClient project is located under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

Building a Visual Basic .NET Client Application

To illustrate the language-agnostic attitude of the .NET platform, let's create another console application (VbNetCarClient), this time using Visual Basic .NET (see Figure 11-10). Once you have created the project, set a reference to `CarLibrary.dll` using the Add Reference dialog box.

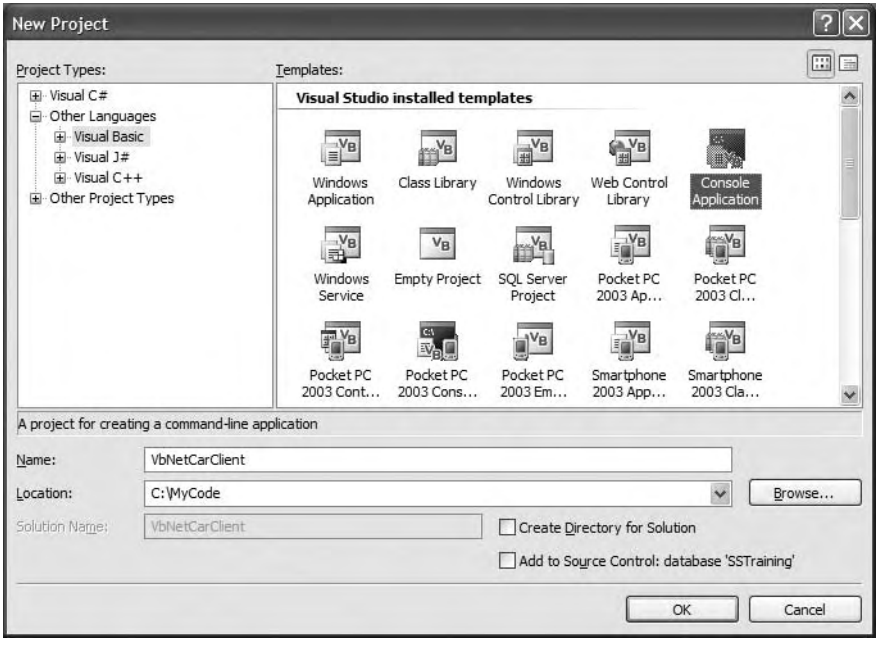


Figure 11-10. *Creating a Visual Basic .NET console application*

Like C#, Visual Basic .NET requires you to list each namespace used within the current file. However, Visual Basic .NET offers the `Imports` keyword rather than the C# `using` keyword. Given this, add the following `Imports` statement within the `Module1.vb` code file:

```
Imports CarLibrary

Module Module1

    Sub Main()
    End Sub

End Module
```

Notice that the `Main()` method is defined within a Visual Basic .NET Module type (which has nothing to do with a `*.netmodule` file for a multifile assembly). Modules are simply a Visual Basic .NET shorthand notation for defining a sealed class that can contain only static methods. To drive this point home, here would be the same construct in C#:

```
// A VB .NET 'Module' is simply a sealed class
// containing static methods.
public sealed class Module1
{
     public static void Main()
     {
     }
}
```

In any case, to exercise the `MiniVan` and `SportsCar` types using the syntax of Visual Basic .NET, update your `Main()` method as so:

```
Sub Main()
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Visual Basic .NET *****")
    Dim myMiniVan As New MiniVan()
    myMiniVan.TurboBoost()

    Dim mySportsCar As New SportsCar()
    mySportsCar.TurboBoost()
    Console.ReadLine()
End Sub
```

When you compile and run your application, you will once again find a series of message boxes displayed.

Cross-Language Inheritance in Action

A very enticing aspect of .NET development is the notion of *cross-language inheritance*. To illustrate, let's create a new Visual Basic .NET class that derives from `SportsCar` (which was authored using C#). First, add a new class file to your current Visual Basic .NET application (by selecting Project ➤ Add Class) named `PerformanceCar.vb`. Update the initial class definition by deriving from the `SportsCar` type using the `Inherits` keyword. Furthermore, override the abstract `TurboBoost()` method using the `Overrides` keyword:

```
Imports CarLibrary

' This VB type is deriving from the C# SportsCar.
Public Class PerformanceCar
  Inherits SportsCar
    Public Overrides Sub TurboBoost()
        Console.WriteLine("Zero to 60 in a cool 4.8 seconds...")
    End Sub
End Class
```

To test this new class type, update the Module's `Main()` method as so:

```
Sub Main()
...
    Dim dreamCar As New PerformanceCar()

    ' Inherited property.
    dreamCar.PetName = "Hank"
    dreamCar.TurboBoost()
    Console.ReadLine()
End Sub
```

Notice that the `dreamCar` object is able to invoke any public member (such as the `PetName` property) found up the chain of inheritance, regardless of the fact that the base class has been defined in a completely different language and is defined in a completely different code library.

■ **Source Code** The VbNetCarClient project is located under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

Building and Consuming a Multifile Assembly

Now that you have constructed and consumed a single-file assembly, let's examine the process of building a multifile assembly. Recall that a multifile assembly is simply a collection of related modules

that is deployed and versioned as a single unit. At the time of this writing, Visual Studio 2005 does not support a C# multifile assembly project template. Therefore, you will need to make use of the command-line compiler (`csc.exe`) if you wish to build such as beast.

To illustrate the process, you will build a multifile assembly named AirVehicles. The primary module (`airvehicles.dll`) will contain a single class type named `Helicopter`. The related manifest (also contained in `airvehicles.dll`) catalogues an additional `*.netmodule` file named `ufo.netmodule`, which contains another class type named (of course) `Ufo`. Although both class types are physically contained in separate binaries, you will group them into a single namespace named `AirVehicles`. Finally, both classes are created using C# (although you could certainly mix and match languages if you desire).

To begin, open a simple text editor (such as Notepad) and create the following `Ufo` class definition saved to a file named `ufo.cs`:

```
using System;

namespace AirVehicles
{
     public class Ufo
     {
          public void AbductHuman()
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Resistance is futile");
          }
     }
}
```

To compile this class into a .NET module, navigate to the folder containing `ufo.cs` and issue the following command to the C# compiler (the `module` option of the `/target` flag instructs `csc.exe` to produce a `*.netmodule` as opposed to a `*.dll` or `*.exe` file):

```
csc.exe /t:module ufo.cs
```

If you now look in the folder that contains the `ufo.cs` file, you should see a new file named `ufo.netmodule` (take a peek). Next, create a new file named `helicopter.cs` that contains the following class definition:

```
using System;

namespace AirVehicles
{
     public class Helicopter
     {
          public void TakeOff()
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Helicopter taking off!");
          }
     }
}
```

Given that `airvehicles.dll` is the intended name of the primary module of this multifile assembly, you will need to compile `helicopter.cs` using the `/t:library` and `/out:` options. To enlist the `ufo.netmodule` binary into the assembly manifest, you must also specify the `/addmodule` flag. The following command does the trick:

```
csc /t:library /addmodule:ufo.netmodule /out:airvehicles.dll helicopter.cs
```

At this point, your directory should contain the primary `airvehicles.dll` module as well as the secondary `ufo.netmodule` binaries.

Exploring the ufo.netmodule File

Now, using `ildasm.exe`, open `ufo.netmodule`. As you can see, `*.netmodules` contain a *module-level manifest*; however, its sole purpose is to list each external assembly referenced by the code base. Given that the `Ufo` class did little more than make a call to `Console.WriteLine()`, you find the following:

```
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
.module ufo.netmodule
```

Exploring the airvehicles.dll File

Next, using `ildasm.exe`, open the primary `airvehicles.dll` module and investigate the assembly-level manifest. Notice that the `.file` token documents the associated modules in the multifile assembly (`ufo.netmodule` in this case). The `.class` extern tokens are used to document the names of the external types referenced for use from the secondary module (`Ufo`):

```
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
.assembly airvehicles
{
...
  .hash algorithm 0x00008004
  .ver 0:0:0:0
}
.file ufo.netmodule
...
.class extern public AirVehicles.Ufo
{
  .file ufo.netmodule
  .class 0x02000002
}
.module airvehicles.dll
```

Again, realize that the only entity that links together `airvehicles.dll` and `ufo.netmodule` is the assembly manifest. These two binary files have not been merged into a single, larger `*.dll`.

Consuming a Multifile Assembly

The consumers of a multifile assembly couldn't care less that the assembly they are referencing is composed of numerous modules. To keep things simple, let's create a new Visual Basic .NET client application at the command line. Create a new file named `Client.vb` with the following Module definition. When you are done, save it in the same location as your multifile assembly.

```
Imports AirVehicles

Module Module1
    Sub Main()
        Dim h As New AirVehicles.Helicopter()
        h.TakeOff()
```

```
        ' This will load the *.netmodule on demand.
        Dim u As New UFO()
        u.AbductHuman()
    End Sub
End Module
```

To compile this executable assembly at the command line, you will make use of the Visual Basic .NET command-line compiler, `vbc.exe`, with the following command set:

```
vbc /r:airvehicles.dll *.vb
```

Notice that when you are referencing a multifile assembly, the compiler needs to be supplied only with the name of the primary module (the `*.netmodules` are loaded on demand when used by the client's code base). In and of themselves, `*.netmodules` do not have an individual version number and cannot be directly loaded by the CLR. Individual `*.netmodules` can be loaded only by the primary module (e.g., the file that contains the assembly manifest).

■ **Note** Visual Studio 2005 also allows you to reference a multifile assembly. Simply use the Add References dialog box and select the primary module. Any related `*.netmodules` are copied during the process.

At this point, you should feel comfortable with the process of building both single-file and multifile assemblies. To be completely honest, chances are that 99.99 percent of your assemblies will be single-file entities. Nevertheless, multifile assemblies can prove helpful when you wish to break a large physical binary into more modular units (and they are quite useful for remote download scenarios). Next up, let's formalize the concept of a private assembly.

■ **Source Code** The MultifileAssembly project is included under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

Understanding Private Assemblies

Technically speaking, the assemblies you've created thus far in this chapter have been deployed as *private assemblies*. Private assemblies are required to be located within the same directory as the client application (termed the *application directory*) or a subdirectory thereof. Recall that when you set a reference to `CarLibrary.dll` while building the `CSharpCarClient.exe` and `VbNetCarClient.exe` applications, Visual Studio 2005 responded by placing a copy of `CarLibrary.dll` within the client's application directory.

When a client program uses the types defined within this external assembly, the CLR simply loads the local copy of `CarLibrary.dll`. Because the .NET runtime does not consult the system registry when searching for referenced assemblies, you can relocate the `CSharpCarClient.exe` (or `VbNetCarClient.exe`) and `CarLibrary.dll` assemblies to location on your machine and run the application (this is often termed *Xcopy deployment*).

Uninstalling (or replicating) an application that makes exclusive use of private assemblies is a no-brainer: simply delete (or copy) the application folder. Unlike with COM applications, you do not need to worry about dozens of orphaned registry settings. More important, you do not need to worry that the removal of private assemblies will break any other applications on the machine.

The Identity of a Private Assembly

The full identity of a private assembly consists of the friendly name and numerical version, both of which are recorded in the assembly manifest. The *friendly name* simply is the name of the module

that contains the assembly's manifest minus the file extension. For example, if you examine the manifest of the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly, you find the following (your version will no doubt differ):

```
.assembly CarLibrary
{
...
   .ver 1:0:454:30104
}
```

Given the isolated nature of a private assembly, it should make sense that the CLR does not bother to make use of the version number when resolving its location. The assumption is that private assemblies do not need to have any elaborate version checking, as the client application is the only entity that "knows" of its existence. Given this, it is (very) possible for a single machine to have multiple copies of the same private assembly in various application directories.

Understanding the Probing Process

The .NET runtime resolves the location of a private assembly using a technique termed *probing*, which is much less invasive than it sounds. Probing is the process of mapping an external assembly request to the location of the requested binary file. Strictly speaking, a request to load an assembly may be either *implicit* or *explicit*. An implicit load request occurs when the CLR consults the manifest in order to resolve the location of an assembly defined using the `.assembly` extern tokens:

```
// An implicit load request.
.assembly extern CarLibrary
{ ...}
```

An explicit load request occurs programmatically using the `Load()` or `LoadFrom()` method of the `System.Reflection.Assembly` class type, typically for the purposes of late binding and dynamic invocation of type members. You'll examine these topics further in Chapter 12, but for now you can see an example of an explicit load request in the following code:

```
// An explicit load request.
Assembly asm = Assembly.Load("CarLibrary");
```

In either case, the CLR extracts the friendly name of the assembly and begins probing the client's application directory for a file named `CarLibrary.dll`. If this file cannot be located, an attempt is made to locate an executable assembly based on the same friendly name (`CarLibrary.exe`). If neither of these files can be located in the application directory, the runtime gives up and throws a `FileNotFound` exception at runtime.

■ **Note** Technically speaking, if a copy of the requested assembly cannot be found within the client's application directory, the CLR will also attempt to locate a client subdirectory with the exact same name as the assembly's friendly name (e.g., C:\MyClient\CarLibrary). If the requested assembly resides within this subdirectory, the CLR will load the assembly into memory.

Configuring Private Assemblies

While it is possible to deploy a .NET application by simply copying all required assemblies to a single folder on the user's hard drive, you will most likely wish to define a number of subdirectories to group related content. For example, assume you have an application directory named C:\MyApp that contains `CSharpCarClient.exe`. Under this folder might be a subfolder named MyLibraries that contains `CarLibrary.dll`.

Regardless of the intended relationship between these two directories, the CLR will *not* probe the MyLibraries subdirectory unless you supply a configuration file. Configuration files contain various XML elements that allow you to influence the probing process. By "law," configuration files must have the same name as the launching application and take a `*.config` file extension, and they must be deployed in the client's application directory. Thus, if you wish to create a configuration file for `CSharpCarClient.exe`, it must be named `CSharpCarClient.exe.config`.

To illustrate the process, create a new directory on your C drive named MyApp using Windows Explorer. Next, copy `CSharpCarClient.exe` and `CarLibrary.dll` to this new folder, and run the program by double-clicking the executable. Your program should run successfully at this point (remember, the assemblies are not registered!). Next, create a new subdirectory under C:\MyApp named MyLibraries (see Figure 11-11), and move `CarLibrary.dll` to this location.

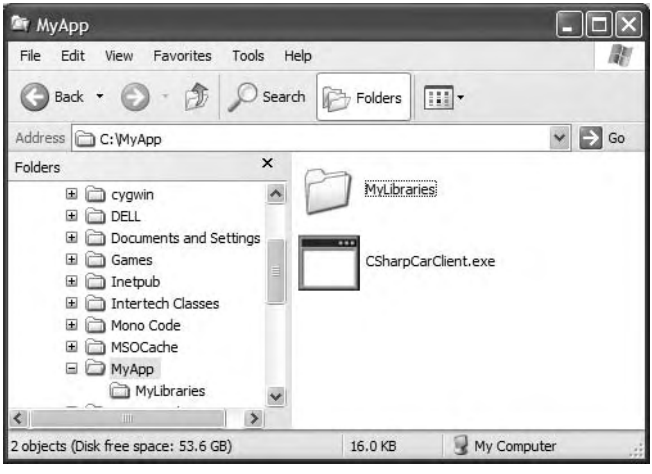


Figure 11-11. `CarLibrary.dll` *now resides under the MyLibraries subdirectory.*

Try to run your client program again. Because the CLR could not locate "CarLibrary" directly within the application directory, you are presented with a rather nasty unhandled `FileNotFound` exception.

To rectify the situation, create a new configuration file named `CSharpCarClient.exe.config` and save it in the *same* folder containing the `CSharpCarClient.exe` application, which in this example would be C:\MyApp. Open this file and enter the following content exactly as shown (be aware that XML is case sensitive!):

```
<configuration>
    <runtime>
        <assemblyBinding xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:asm.v1">
            <probing privatePath="MyLibraries"/>
        </assemblyBinding>
    </runtime>
</configuration>
```

.NET `*.config` files always open with a root element named `<configuration>`. The nested `<runtime>` element may specify an `<assemblyBinding>` element, which nests a further element named `<probing>`. The `privatePath` attribute is the key point in this example, as it is used to specify the subdirectories relative to the application directory where the CLR should probe.

Do note that the `<probing>` element does not specify *which* assembly is located under a given subdirectory. In other words, you cannot say, "CarLibrary is located under the MyLibraries subdirectory, but MathUtils is located under Bin subdirectory." The `<probing>` element simply instructs the CLR to investigate all specified subdirectories for the requested assembly until the first match is encountered.

■ **Note** Be very aware that the `privatePath` attribute *cannot be used* to specify an absolute (C:\SomeFolder\SomeSubFolder) or relative (..\\SomeFolder\\AnotherFolder) path! If you wish to specify a directory outside the client's application directory, you will need to make use of a completely different XML element named `<codeBase>` (more details on this element later in the chapter).

Multiple subdirectories can be assigned to the `privatePath` attribute using a semicolon-delimited list. You have no need to do so at this time, but here is an example that informs the CLR to consult the MyLibraries and MyLibraries\Tests client subdirectories:

```
<probing privatePath="MyLibraries; MyLibraries\Tests"/>
```

Once you've finished creating `CSharpCarClient.exe.config`, run the client by double-clicking the executable in Windows Explorer. You should find that `CSharpCarClient.exe` executes without a hitch (if this is not the case, double-check it for typos).

Next, for testing purposes, change the name of your configuration file (in one way or another) and attempt to run the program once again. The client application should now fail. Remember that `*.config` files must be prefixed with the same name as the related client application. By way of a final test, open your configuration file for editing and capitalize any of the XML elements. Once the file is saved, your client should fail to run once again (as XML is case sensitive).

Configuration Files and Visual Studio 2005

While you are always able to create XML configuration files by hand using your text editor of choice, Visual Studio 2005 allows you create a configuration file during the development of the client program. To illustrate, load the CSharpCarClient solution into Visual Studio 2005 and insert a new Application Configuration File item using the Project ➤ Add New Item menu selection. Before you click the OK button, take note that the file is named `App.config` (don't rename it!). If you look in the Solution Explorer window, you will now find `App.config` has been inserted into your current project (see Figure 11-12).

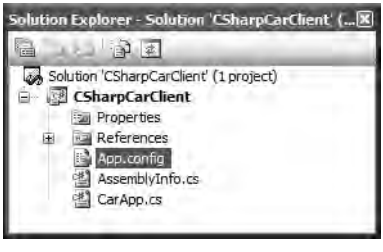


Figure 11-12. *The Visual Studio 2005* `App.config` *file*

At this point, you are free to enter the necessary XML elements for the client you happen to be creating. Now, here is the cool thing. Each time you compile your project, Visual Studio 2005 will

automatically copy the data in `App.config` to the `\Bin\Debug` directory using the proper naming convention (such as `CSharpCarClient.exe.config`). However, this behavior will happen only if your configuration file is indeed named `App.config`.

Using this approach, all you need to do is maintain `App.config`, and Visual Studio 2005 will ensure your application directory contains the latest and greatest content (even if you happen to rename your project).

Introducing the .NET Framework 2.0 Configuration Utility

Although authoring a `*.config` file by hand is not too traumatic, the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK does ship with a tool that allows you to build XML configuration files using a friendly GUI. You can find the .NET Framework 2.0 Configuration utility under the Administrative folder of your Control Panel. Once you launch this tool, you will find a number of configuration options (see Figure 11-13).



Figure 11-13. *The .NET Framework 2.0 Configuration utility*

To build a client `*.config` file using this utility, your first step is to add the application to configure by right-clicking the Applications node and selecting Add. In the resulting dialog box, you *may* find the application you wish to configure, provided that you have executed it using Windows Explorer. If this is not the case, click the Other button and navigate to the location of the client program you wish to configure. For this example, select the `VbNetCarClient.exe` application created earlier in this chapter (look under the Bin folder). Once you have done so, you will now find a new subnode, as shown in Figure 11-14.

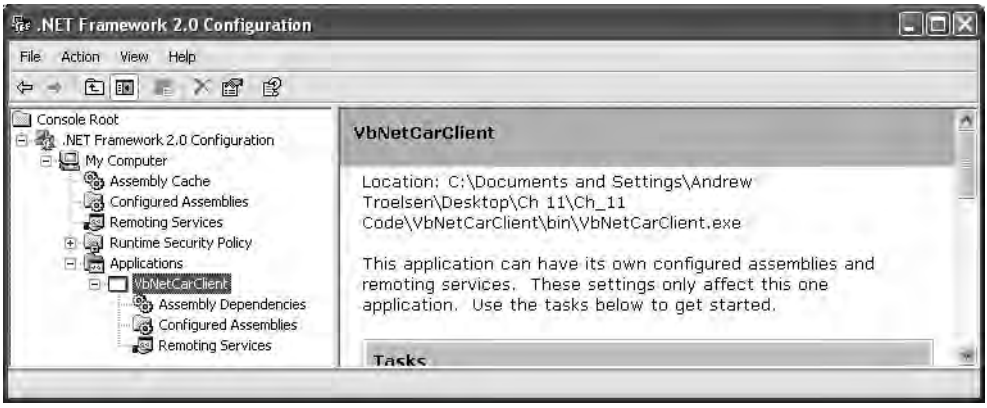


Figure 11-14. *Preparing to configure* `VbNetCarClient.exe`

If you right-click the VbNetCarClient node and activate the Properties page, you will notice a text field located at the bottom of the dialog box where you can enter the values to be assigned to the `privatePath` attribute. Just for testing purposes, enter a subdirectory named **TestDir** (see Figure 11-15).

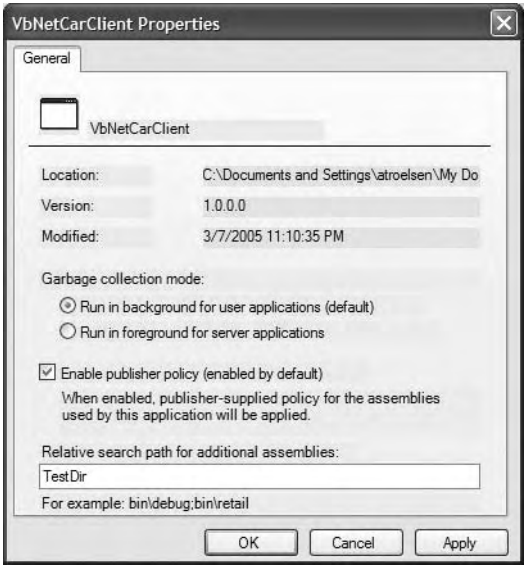


Figure 11-15. *Configuring a private probing path graphically*

Once you click the OK button, you can examine the VbNetCarClient\Debug directory and find that the default `*.config` file (which Visual Studio 2005 provides for most VB .NET programs) has been updated with the correct `<probing>` element.

■ **Note** As you may guess, you can copy the XML content generated by the .NET Framework 2.0 Configuration utility into a Visual Studio 2005 `App.config` file for further editing. Using this approach, you can certainly decrease your typing burden by allowing the tool to generate the initial content.

Understanding Shared Assemblies

Now that you understand how to deploy and configure a private assembly, you can begin to examine the role of a *shared assembly*. Like a private assembly, a shared assembly is a collection of types and (optional) resources. The most obvious difference between shared and private assemblies is the fact that a single copy of a shared assembly can be used by several applications on a single machine.

Consider all the applications created in this text that required you to set a reference to `System.Windows.Forms.dll`. If you were to look in the application directory of each of these clients, you would *not* find a private copy of this .NET assembly. The reason is that `System.Windows.Forms.dll` has been deployed as a shared assembly. Clearly, if you need to create a machine-wide class library, this is the way to go.

As suggested in the previous paragraph, a shared assembly is not deployed within the same directory as the application making use of it. Rather, shared assemblies are installed into the Global Assembly Cache (GAC). The GAC is located under a subdirectory of your Windows directory named Assembly (e.g., C:\Windows\Assembly), as shown in Figure 11-16.

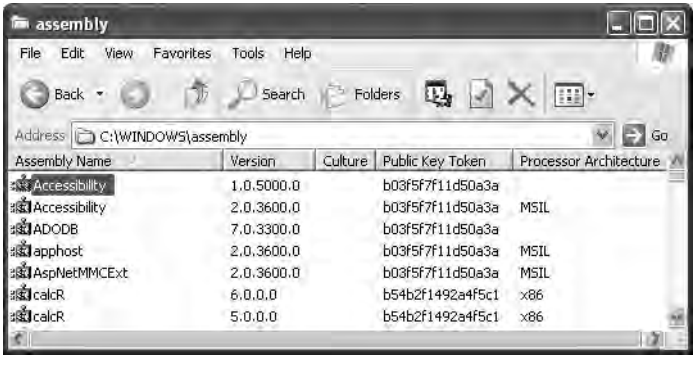

assembly
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Folders
Address C:\WINDOWS\assembly
Go
Assembly Name | Version | Culture | Public Key Token | Processor Architecture
Accessibility 1.0.5000.0 b03f5f7f11d50a3a
Accessibility 2.0.3600.0 b03f5f7f11d50a3a MSIL
ADODB 7.0.3300.0 b03f5f7f11d50a3a
apphost 2.0.3600.0 b03f5f7f11d50a3a MSIL
AspNetMMCExt 2.0.3600.0 b03f5f7f11d50a3a MSIL
calcR 6.0.0.0 b54b2f1492a4f5c1 x86
calcR 5.0.0.0 b54b2f1492a4f5c1 x86

Figure 11-16. *The GAC*

■ **Note** You cannot install executable assemblies (`*.exe`) into the GAC. Only assemblies that take the `*.dll` file extension can be deployed as a shared assembly.

Understanding Strong Names

Before you can deploy an assembly to the GAC, you must assign it a *strong name*, which is used to uniquely identify the publisher of a given .NET binary. Understand that a "publisher" could be an individual programmer, a department within a given company, or an entire company at large.

In some ways, a strong name is the modern day .NET equivalent of the COM globally unique identifier (GUID) identification scheme. If you have a COM background, you may recall that AppIDs are GUIDs that identify a particular COM application. Unlike COM GUID values (which are nothing more than 128-bit numbers), strong names are based (in part) on two cryptographically related keys (termed the *public key* and the *private key*), which are much more unique and resistant to tampering than a simple GUID.

Formally, a strong name is composed of a set of related data, much of which is specified using assembly-level attributes:

- The friendly name of the assembly (which you recall is the name of the assembly minus the file extension)
- The version number of the assembly (assigned using the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute)
- The public key value (assigned using the `[AssemblyKeyFile]` attribute)
- An optional culture identity value for localization purposes (assigned using the `[AssemblyCulture]` attribute)
- An embedded *digital signature* created using a hash of the assembly's contents and the private key value

To provide a strong name for an assembly, your first step is to generate public/private key data using the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK's `sn.exe` utility (which you'll do momentarily). The `sn.exe` utility responds by generating a file (typically ending with the `*.snk` [Strong Name Key] file extension) that contains data for two distinct but mathematically related keys, the "public" key and the "private" key. Once the C# compiler is made aware of the location for your `*.snk` file, it will record the full public key value in the assembly manifest using the `.publickey` token at the time of compilation.

The C# compiler will also generate a hash code based on the contents of the entire assembly (CIL code, metadata, and so forth). As you recall from Chapter 3, a *hash code* is a numerical value that is unique for a fixed input. Thus, if you modify any aspect of a .NET assembly (even a single character in a string literal) the compiler yields a unique hash code. This hash code is combined with the private key data within the `*.snk` file to yield a digital signature embedded within the assembly's CLR header data. The process of strongly naming an assembly is illustrated in Figure 11-17.

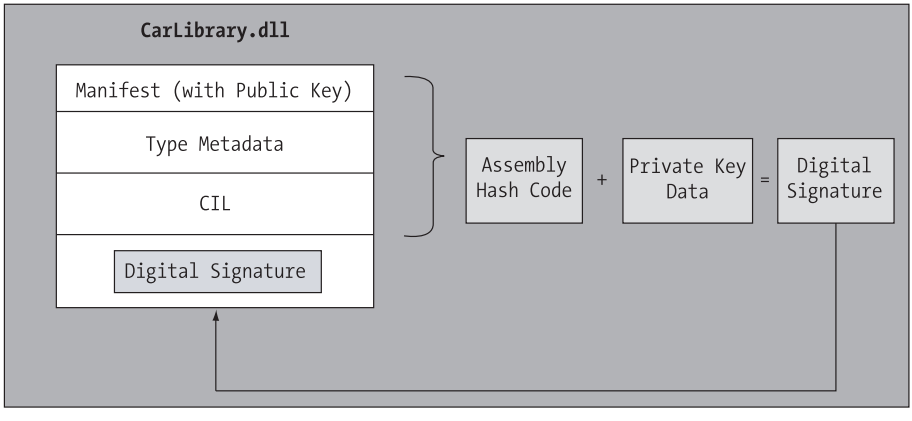


Figure 11-17. *At compile time, a digital signature is generated and embedded into the assembly based in part on public and private key data.*

Understand that the actual *private* key data is not listed anywhere within the manifest, but is used only to digitally sign the contents of the assembly (in conjunction with the generated hash code). Again, the whole idea of making use of public/private key cryptography is to ensure that no two companies, departments, or individuals have the same identity in the .NET universe. In any case, once the process of assigning a strong name is complete, the assembly may be installed into the GAC.

■ **Note** Strong names also provide a level of protection against potential evildoers tampering with your assembly's contents. Given this point, it considered a .NET best practice to strongly name every assembly regardless if it is deployed to the GAC.

Strongly Naming CarLibrary.dll

Let's walk through the process of assigning a strong name to the CarLibrary assembly created earlier in this chapter (go ahead and open up that project using your IDE of choice). The first order of business is to generate the required key data using the `sn.exe` utility. Although this tool has numerous command-line options, all you need to concern yourself with for the moment is the `-k` flag, which instructs the tool to generate a new file containing the public/private key information. Create a new folder on your C drive named MyTestKeyPair and change to that directory using the .NET Command Prompt. Now, issue the following command to generate a file named `MyTestKeyPair.snk`:

```
sn -k MyTestKeyPair.snk
```

Now that you have your key data, you need to inform the C# compiler exactly where `MyTestKeyPair.snk` is located. When you create any new C# project workspace using Visual Studio 2005, you will notice that one of your initial project files (located under the Properties node of Solution Explorer) is named `AssemblyInfo.cs`. This file contains a number of attributes that describe the assembly itself. The `AssemblyKeyFile` assembly-level attribute can be used to inform the compiler of the location of a valid `*.snk` file. Simply specify the path as a string parameter, for example:

```
[assembly: AssemblyKeyFile(@"C:\MyTestKeyPair\MyTestKeyPair.snk")]
```

Given that the version of a shared assembly is one aspect of a strong name, let's also specify a specific version number for `CarLibrary.dll`. In the `AssemblyInfo.cs` file, you will find another attribute named `AssemblyVersion`. Initially the value is set to `1.0.*`:

```
[assembly: AssemblyVersion("1.0.*")]
```

Recall that a .NET version number is composed of the four parts (*<major>.<minor>.<build>.<revision>*). Until you say otherwise, Visual Studio 2005 automatically increments the build and revision numbers (as marked by the * wildcard token) as part of each compilation. To enforce a fixed value for the assembly's build version, replace the wildcard token with a specific build and revision value:

```
// Format: <Major version>.<Minor version>.<Build number>.<Revision>
// Valid values for each part of the version number are between 0 and 65535.
[assembly: AssemblyVersion("1.0.0.0")]
```

At this point, the C# compiler has all the information needed to generate strong name data (as you are not specifying a unique culture value via the `[AssemblyCulture]` attribute, you "inherit" the culture of your current machine). Compile your CarLibrary code library and open the manifest using `ildasm.exe`. You will now see a new `.publickey` tag is used to document the full public key information, while the `.ver` token records the version specified via the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute (see Figure 11-18).

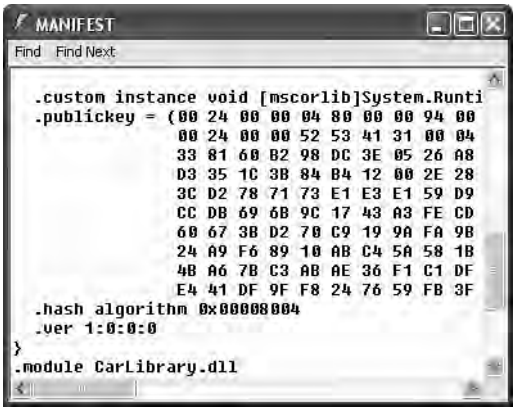

MANIFEST
Find Find Next
.custom instance void [mscorlib]System.Runti
.publickey = (00 24 00 00 04 80 00 00 94 00
00 24 00 00 52 53 41 31 00 04
33 81 60 B2 98 DC 3E 05 26 A8
D3 35 1C 3B 84 B4 12 00 2E 28
3C D2 78 71 73 E1 E3 E1 59 D9
CC DB 69 6B 9C 17 43 A3 FE CD
60 67 3B D2 70 C9 19 9A FA 9B
24 A9 F6 89 10 AB C4 5A 58 1B
4B A6 7B C3 AB AE 36 F1 C1 DF
E4 41 DF 9F F8 24 76 59 FB 3F
.hash algorithm 0x00008004
.ver 1:0:0:0
}
.module CarLibrary.dll

Figure 11-18. *A strongly named assembly records the public key in the manifest.*

Assigning Strong Names Using Visual Studio 2005

Before you deploy `CarLibrary.dll` to the GAC, let me point out that Visual Studio 2005 allows you to specify the location of your `*.snk` file using the project's Properties page (in fact, this is now considered the preferred approach; using the `[AssemblyKeyFile]` attribute generates a compiler warning under Visual Studio 2005). To do so, select the Signing node, supply the path to the `*.snk` file, and select the "Sign the assembly" check box (see Figure 11-19).

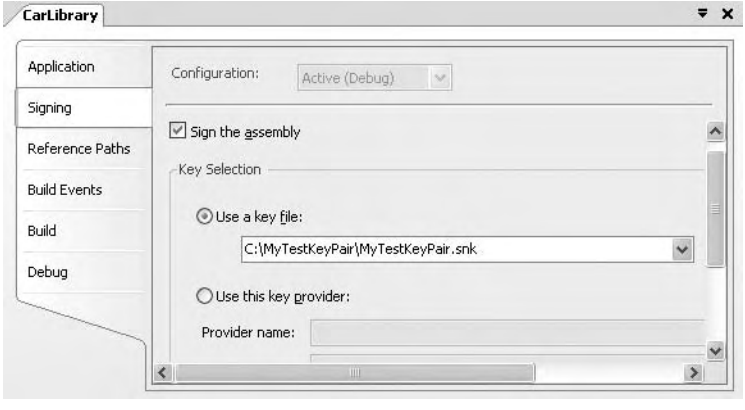


Figure 11-19. *Specifying a* `*.snk` *file via the Properties page*

Installing/Removing Shared Assemblies to/from the GAC

The final step is to install the (now strongly named) `CarLibrary.dll` into the GAC. The simplest way to install a shared assembly into the GAC is to drag and drop the assembly to C:\Windows\Assembly using Windows Explorer (which is ideal for a quick test).

In addition, the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK provides a command-line utility named `gacutil.exe` that allows you to examine and modify the contents of the GAC. Table 11-1 documents some relevant options of `gacutil.exe` (specify the `/?` flag to see each option).

Table 11-1. *Various Options of* `gacutil.exe`

Option	Meaning in Life
`/i`	Installs a strongly named assembly into the GAC
`/u`	Uninstalls an assembly form the GAC
`/l`	Displays the assemblies (or a specific assembly) in the GAC

Using either technique, deploy `CarLibrary.dll` to the GAC. Once you've finished, you should see your library present and accounted for (see Figure 11-20).

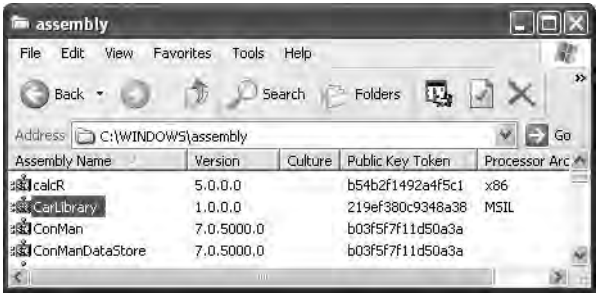


Figure 11-20. *The strongly named, shared CarLibrary (version 1.0.0.0)*

■ **Note** You may right-click any assembly icon to pull up its Properties page, and you may also uninstall a specific version of an assembly altogether from the right-click context menu (the GUI equivalent of supplying the `/u` flag to `gacutil.exe`).

The Role of Delayed Signing

When you are building your own custom .NET assemblies, you are able to assign a strong name using your own personal `*.snk` file. However, given the sensitive nature of a public/private key file, don't be too surprised if your company/department refuses to give you access to the master `*.snk` file. This is an obvious problem, given that we (as developers) will often need to install an assembly into the GAC for testing purposes. To allow this sort of testing (while not distributing the true `*.snk` file), you are able to make use of *delayed signing*. We have no need to do so for the current `CarLibrary.dll`; however, here is an overview of the process.

Delayed signing begins by the trusted individual holding the `*.snk` file extracting the public key value from the public/private `*.snk` file using the `-p` command-line flag of `sn.exe`, to produce a new file that only contains the public key value:

```
sn -p myKey.snk testPublicKey.snk
```

At this point, the `testPublicKey.snk` file can be distributed to individual developers for the creation and testing of strongly named assemblies. To inform the C# compiler that the assembly in question is making use of delayed signing, the developer must make sure to set the value of the `AssemblyDelaySign` attribute to `true` in addition to specifying the pseudo-key file as the parameter to the `AssemblyKeyFile` attribute. Here are the relevant updates to the project's `AssemblyInfo.cs` file:

```
[assembly: AssemblyDelaySign(true)]
[assembly: AssemblyKeyFile(@"C:\MyKey\testPublicKey.snk)]
```

Note If you are using Visual Studio 2005, these same attributes can be established visually using the Properties page of your project.

Once an assembly has enabled delayed signing, the next step is to disable the signature verification process that happens automatically when an assembly is deployed to the GAC. To do so, specify the `-vr` flag (using `sn.exe`) to skip the verification process on the current machine:

```
sn.exe -vr MyAssembly.dll
```

Once all testing has been performed, the assembly in question can be shipped to the trusted individual who holds the "true" public/private key file to resign the binary to provide the correct digital signature. Again, `sn.exe` provides the necessary behavior, this time using the `-r` flag:

```
sn.exe -r MyAssembly.dll C:\MyKey\myKey.snk
```

To enable the signature verification process, the final step is to apply the `-vu` flag:

```
sn.exe -vu MyAssembly.dll
```

Understand, of course, that if you (or your company) only build assemblies intended for internal use, you may never need to bother with the process of delayed signing. However, if you are in the business of building .NET assemblies that may be purchased by external parties, the ability to delay signing keeps things safe and sane for all involved.

Consuming a Shared Assembly

When you are building applications that make use of a shared assembly, the only difference from consuming a private assembly is in how you reference the library using Visual Studio 2005. In reality, there is no difference as far as the tool is concerned (you still make use of the Add Reference dialog box). What you must understand is that this dialog box will *not* allow you to reference the assembly by browsing to the Assembly folder. Any efforts to do so will be in vain, as you cannot reference the assembly you have highlighted (see Figure 11-21).

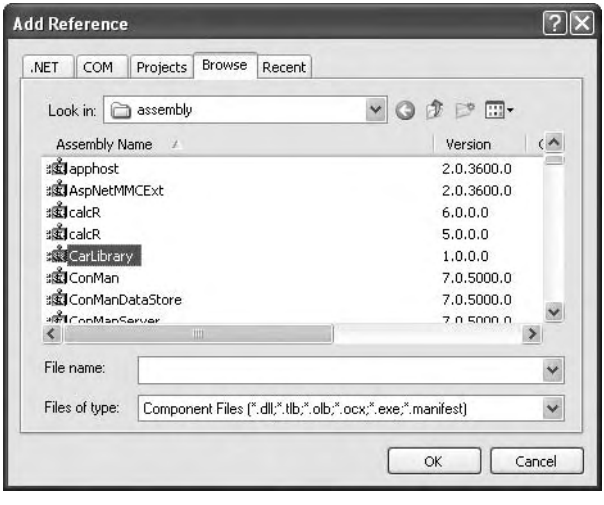


Figure 11-21. *Nope! You can't reference shared assemblies by navigating to the Assembly folder using Visual Studio 2005.*

Rather, you will need to browse to the \Bin\Debug directory of the *original* project via the Browse tab (see Figure 11-22).

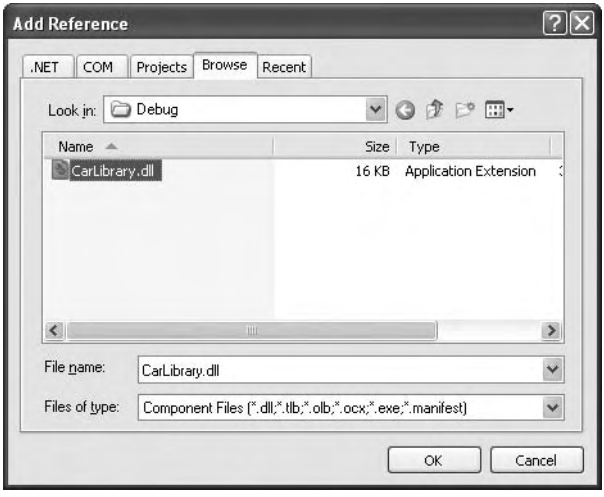


Figure 11-22. *Correct! You must reference shared assemblies by navigating to the project's \Bin\Debug directory using Visual Studio 2005.*

This (somewhat annoying) fact aside, create a new C# console application named SharedCarLibClient and exercise your types as you wish:

```
using CarLibrary;

namespace SharedCarLibClient
{
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            SportsCar c = new SportsCar();
            c.TurboBoost();
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

Once you have compiled your client application, navigate to the directory that contains `SharedCarLibClient.exe` using Windows Explorer and notice that Visual Studio 2005 has *not* copied `CarLibrary.dll` to the client's application directory. When you reference an assembly whose manifest contains a `.publickey` value, Visual Studio 2005 assumes the strongly named assembly will most likely be deployed in the GAC, and therefore does not bother to copy the binary.

As a quick side note, if you wish to have Visual Studio 2005 copy a shared assembly to the client directory, you can select an assembly from the References node of Solution Explorer and set the Copy Local property to True or False using the Properties window (see Figure 11-23).



Figure 11-23. *The Copy Local property can force a copy of a strongly named code library.*

Exploring the Manifest of SharedCarLibClient

Recall that when you generate a strong name for an assembly, the entire public key is recorded in the assembly manifest. On a related note, when a client references a strongly named assembly, its manifest records a condensed hash-value of the full public key, denoted by the `.publickeytoken` tag. If you were to open the manifest of `SharedCarLibClient.exe` using `ildasm.exe`, you would find the following:

```
.assembly extern CarLibrary
{
  .publickeytoken = (21 9E F3 80 C9 34 8A 38)
  .ver 1:0:0:0
}
```

If you compare the value of the public key token recorded in the client manifest with the public key token value shown in the GAC, you will find a dead-on match. Recall that a public key represents one aspect of the strongly named assembly's identity. Given this, the CLR will only load version 1.0.0.0 of an assembly named CarLibrary that has a public key that can be hashed down to the value 219EF380C9348A38. If the CLR does not find an assembly meeting this description in the GAC (and cannot find a private assembly named CarLibrary in the client's directory), a `FileNotFound` exception is thrown.

■ **Source Code** The SharedCarLibClient application can be found under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

Configuring Shared Assemblies

Like a private assembly, shared assemblies can be configured using a client `*.config` file. Of course, because shared assemblies are found in a well-known location (the GAC), you will not specify a `<privatePath>` element as you did for private assemblies (although if the client is using both shared and private assemblies, the `<privatePath>` element may still exist in the `*.config` file).

You can use application configuration files in conjunction with shared assemblies whenever you wish to instruct the CLR to bind to a *different* version of a specific assembly, effectively bypassing the

value recorded in the client's manifest. This can be useful for a number of reasons. For example, imagine that you have shipped version 1.0.0.0 of an assembly and discover a major bug some time after the fact. One corrective action would be to rebuild the client application to reference the correct version of the bug-free assembly (say, 1.1.0.0) and redistribute the updated client and new library to each and every target machine.

Another option is to ship the new code library and a `*.config` file that automatically instructs the runtime to bind to the new (bug-free) version. As long as the new version has been installed into the GAC, the original client runs without recompilation, redistribution, or fear of having to update your resume.

Here's another example: you have shipped the first version of a bug-free assembly (1.0.0.0), and after a month or two, you add new functionality to the assembly in question to yield version 2.0.0.0. Obviously, existing client applications that were compiled against version 1.0.0.0 have no clue about these new types, given that their code base makes no reference to them.

New client applications, however, wish to make reference to the new functionality found in version 2.0.0.0. Under .NET, you are free to ship version 2.0.0.0 to the target machines, and have version 2.0.0.0 run alongside the older version 1.0.0.0. If necessary, existing clients can be dynamically redirected to load version 2.0.0.0 (to gain access to the implementation refinements), using an application configuration file without needing to recompile and redeploy the client application.

Freezing the Current Shared Assembly

To illustrate how to dynamically bind to a specific version of a shared assembly, open Windows Explorer and copy the current version of CarLibrary (1.0.0.0) into a distinct subdirectory (I called mine "Version 1") off the project root to symbolize the freezing of this version (see Figure 11-24).

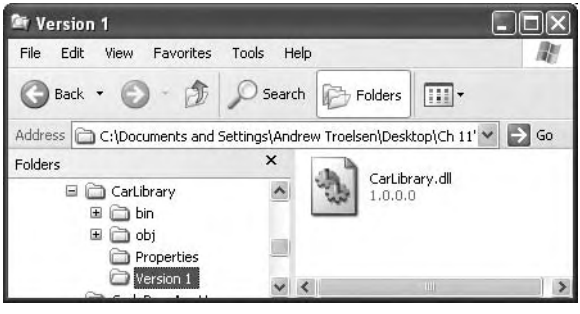


Figure 11-24. *Freezing the current version of* `CarLibrary.dll`

Building Shared Assembly Version 2.0.0.0

Now, update your CarLibrary project to define a new enum named `MusicMedia` that defines four possible musical devices:

```
// Holds source of music.
public enum MusicMedia
{
     musicCd,
     musicTape,
     musicRadio,
     musicMp3
}
```

As well, add a new public method to the `Car` type that allows the caller to turn on one of the given media players:

```
public abstract class Car
{
...
     public void TurnOnRadio(bool musicOn, MusicMedia mm)
     {
          if(musicOn)
               MessageBox.Show(string.Format("Jamming {0}", mm));
          else
               MessageBox.Show("Quiet time...");
     }
...
}
```

Update the constructors of the `Car` class to display a `MessageBox` that verifies you are indeed using CarLibrary 2.0.0.0:

```
public abstract class Car
{
...
     public Car()
     {
          MessageBox.Show("Car 2.0.0.0");
     }
     public Car(string name, short max, short curr)
     {
          MessageBox.Show("Car 2.0.0.0");
          petName = name; maxSpeed = max; currSpeed = curr;
     }
...
}
```

Finally, before you recompile, be sure to update this version of this assembly to 2.0.0.0 by updating the value passed to the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute:

```
// CarLibrary version 2.0.0.0 (now with music!)
[assembly: AssemblyVersion("2.0.0.0")]
```

If you look in your project's \Bin\Debug folder, you'll see that you have a new version of this assembly (2.0.0.0), while version 1.0.0.0 is safe in storage under the Version 1 subdirectory. Install this new assembly into the GAC as described earlier in this chapter. Notice that you now have two versions of the same assembly (see Figure 11-25).



Figure 11-25. *Side-by-side execution*

If you were to run the current SharedCarLibClient.exe program by double-clicking the icon using Windows Explorer, you should *not* see the "Car 2.0.0.0" message box appear, as the manifest is specifically requesting version 1.0.0.0. How then can you instruct the CLR to bind to version 2.0.0.0? Glad you asked.

Dynamically Redirecting to Specific Versions of a Shared Assembly

When you wish to inform the CLR to load a version of a shared assembly other than the version listed in its manifest, you may build a *.config file that contains a <dependentAssembly> element. When doing so, you will need to create an <assemblyIdentity> subelement that specifies the friendly name of the assembly listed in the client manifest (CarLibrary, for this example) and an optional culture attribute (which can be assigned an empty string or omitted altogether if you wish to specify the default culture for the machine). Moreover, the <dependentAssembly> element will define a <bindingRedirect> subelement to define the version *currently* in the manifest (via the oldVersion attribute) and the version in the GAC to load instead (via the newVersion attribute).

Create a new configuration file in the application directory of SharedCarLibClient named SharedCarLibClient.exe.config that contains the following XML data. Of course, the value of your public key token will be different from what you see in the following code, and it can be obtained either by examining the client manifest using ildasm.exe or via the GAC.

```
<configuration>
    <runtime>
        <assemblyBinding xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:asm.v1">
            <dependentAssembly>
                <assemblyIdentity name="CarLibrary"
                         publicKeyToken="219ef380c9348a38"
                         culture=""/>
                <bindingRedirect oldVersion= "1.0.0.0"
                   newVersion= "2.0.0.0"/>
            </dependentAssembly>
        </assemblyBinding>
    </runtime>
</configuration>
```

Now run the SharedCarLibClient.exe program. You should see the message that displays version 2.0.0.0 has loaded. If you set the newVersion attribute to 1.0.0.0 (or if you simply deleted the *.config file), you now see the message that version 1.0.0.0 has loaded, as the CLR found version 1.0.0.0 listed in the client's manifest.

Multiple <dependentAssembly> elements can appear within a client's configuration file. Although you have no need to do so, assume that the manifest of SharedCarLibClient.exe also referenced version 2.5.0.0 of an assembly named MathLibrary. If you wished to redirect to version 3.0.0.0 of MathLibrary (in addition to version 2.0.0.0 of CarLibrary), the SharedCarLibClient.exe.config file would look like the following:

```
<configuration>
    <runtime>
        <assemblyBinding xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:asm.v1">
            <dependentAssembly>
                <assemblyIdentity name="CarLibrary"
                         publicKeyToken="219ef380c9348a38"
                         culture=""/>
                <bindingRedirect oldVersion= "1.0.0.0"
                   newVersion= "2.0.0.0"/>
            </dependentAssembly>
```

```
            <dependentAssembly>
                <assemblyIdentity name="MathLibrary"
                         publicKeyToken="219ef380c9348a38"
                         culture=""/>
                <bindingRedirect oldVersion= "2.5.0.0"
                   newVersion= "3.0.0.0"/>
            </dependentAssembly>
        </assemblyBinding>
    </runtime>
</configuration>
```

Revisiting the .NET Framework 2.0 Configuration Utility

As you would hope, you can generate shared assembly–centric `*.config` files using the graphical .NET Framework 2.0 Configuration utility. Like the process of building a `*.config` file for private assemblies, the first step is to reference the `*.exe` to configure. To illustrate, delete the `SharedCarLibClient.exe.config` you just authored. Now, add a reference to `SharedCarLibClient.exe` by right-clicking the Applications node. Once you do, expand the plus sign (+) icon and select the Configured Assemblies subnode. From here, click the Configure an Assembly link on the right side of the utility.

At this point, you are presented with a dialog box that allows you to establish a `<dependentAssembly>` element using a number of friendly UI elements. First, select the "Choose an assembly from the list of assemblies this application uses" radio button (which simply means, "Show me the manifest!") and click the Choose Assembly button.

A dialog box now displays that shows you not only the assemblies specifically listed in the client manifest, but also the assemblies referenced by these assemblies. For this example's purposes, select CarLibrary. When you click the Finish button, you will be shown a Properties page for this one small aspect of the client's manifest. Here, you can generate the `<dependentAssembly>` using the Binding Policy tab.

Once you select the Binding Policy tab, you can set the `oldVersion` attribute (1.0.0.0) via the Requested Version text field and the `newVersion` attribute (2.0.0.0) using the New Version text field. Once you have committed the settings, you will find the following configuration file is generated for you:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<configuration>
   <runtime>
      <assemblyBinding xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:asm.v1">
         <dependentAssembly>
            <assemblyIdentity name="CarLibrary"
               publicKeyToken="219ef380c9348a38" />
            <publisherPolicy apply="yes" />
            <bindingRedirect oldVersion="1.0.0.0" newVersion="2.0.0.0" />
         </dependentAssembly>
      </assemblyBinding>
   </runtime>
</configuration>
```

Investigating the Internal Composition of the GAC

So far, so good. Now, let's dig into the internal composition of the GAC itself. When you view the GAC using Windows Explorer, you find a number of icons representing each version of a shared assembly. This graphical shell is provided courtesy of a COM server named `shfusion.dll`. As you may suspect, however, beneath these icons is an elaborate (but predictable) directory structure.

To understand what the GAC really boils down to, open a command prompt and change to the Assembly directory:

```
cd c:\windows\assembly
```

Issue a `dir` command from the command line. Here you will find a folder named GAC_MISL (see Figure 11-26).

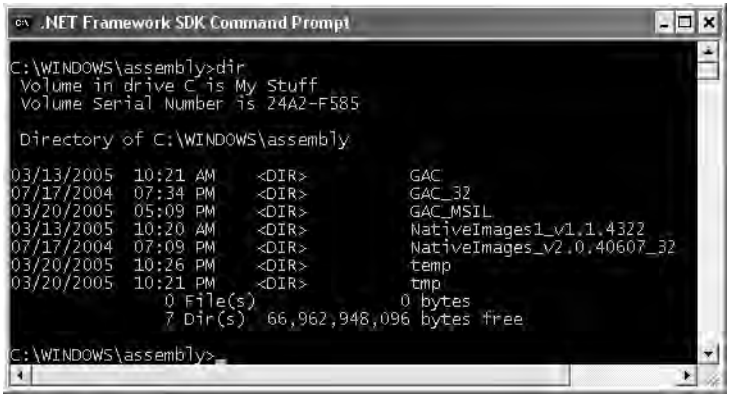


Figure 11-26. *The hidden GAC_MSIL subdirectory*

Change to the GAC_MSIL directory and issue a `dir` command once more. You will now be presented with a list of a number of subdirectories that happen to have the same exact name as the icons displayed by `shfusion.dll`. Change to the CarLibrary subdirectory and again issue a `dir` command (see Figure 11-27).

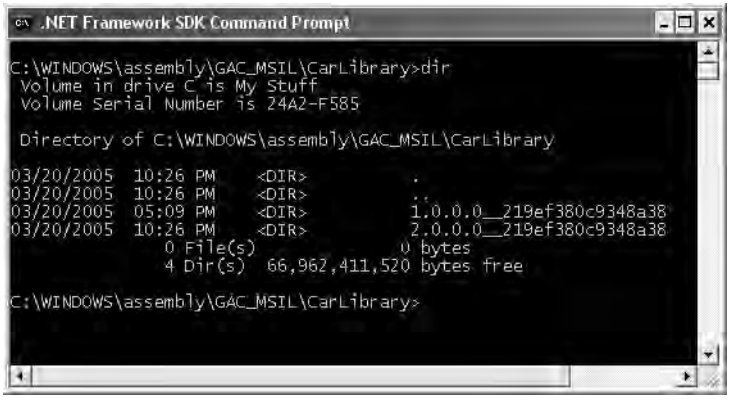


Figure 11-27. *Inside the hidden CarLibrary subdirectory*

As you can see, the GAC maintains a subdirectory for each version of a shared assembly, which follows the naming convention `<versionOfAssembly>__PublicKeyToken`. If you were again to change the current directory to version 1.0.0.0 of CarLibrary, you would indeed find a copy of the code library (see Figure 11-28).

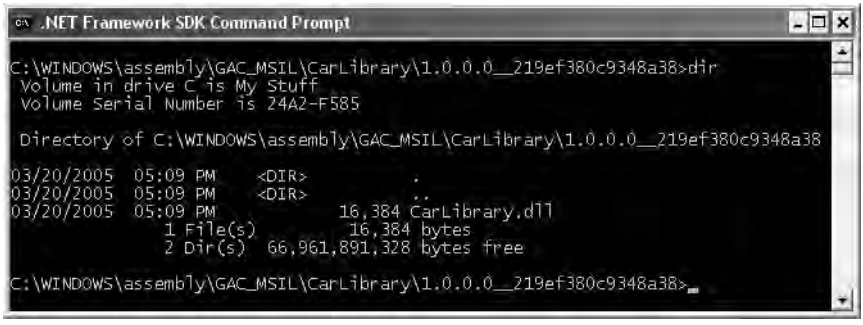

.NET Framework SDK Command Prompt
C:\WINDOWS\assembly\GAC_MSIL\CarLibrary\1.0.0.0__219ef380c9348a38>dir
Volume in drive C is My Stuff
Volume Serial Number is 24A2-F585
Directory of C:\WINDOWS\assembly\GAC_MSIL\CarLibrary\1.0.0.0__219ef380c9348a38
03/20/2005 05:09 PM <DIR> .
03/20/2005 05:09 PM <DIR> ..
03/20/2005 05:09 PM 16,384 CarLibrary.dll
1 File(s) 16,384 bytes
2 Dir(s) 66,961,891,328 bytes free
C:\WINDOWS\assembly\GAC_MSIL\CarLibrary\1.0.0.0__219ef380c9348a38>

Figure 11-28. *Behold! The GAC's internal copy of* `CarLibrary.dll`.

When you install a strongly named assembly into the GAC, the operating system responds by extending the directory structure beneath the Assembly subdirectory. Using this approach, the CLR is able to manipulate multiple versions of a specific assembly while avoiding the expected name clashes resulting from identically named `*.dll`s.

Understanding Publisher Policy Assemblies

The next configuration issue you'll examine is the role of *publisher policy assemblies*. As you've just seen, `*.config` files can be constructed to bind to a specific version of a shared assembly, thereby bypassing the version recorded in the client manifest. While this is all well and good, imagine you're an administrator who now needs to reconfigure all client applications on a given machine to rebind to version 2.0.0.0 of the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly. Given the strict naming convention of a configuration file, you would need to duplicate the same XML content in numerous locations (assuming you are, in fact, aware of the locations of the executables using CarLibrary!). Clearly this would be a maintenance nightmare.

Publisher policy allows the publisher of a given assembly (you, your department, your company, or what have you) to ship a binary version of a `*.config` file that is installed into the GAC along with the newest version of the associated assembly. The benefit of this approach is that client application directories do *not* need to contain specific `*.config` files. Rather, the CLR will read the current manifest and attempt to find the requested version in the GAC. However, if the CLR finds a publisher policy assembly, it will read the embedded XML data and perform the requested redirection *at the level of the GAC*.

Publisher policy assemblies are created at the command line using a .NET utility named `al.exe` (the assembly linker). While this tool provides a large number of options, building a publisher policy assembly requires you only to pass in the following input parameters:

- The location of the `*.config` or `*.xml` file containing the redirecting instructions
- The name of the resulting publisher policy assembly
- The location of the `*.snk` file used to sign the publisher policy assembly
- The version numbers to assign the publisher policy assembly being constructed

If you wish to build a publisher policy assembly that controls `CarLibrary.dll`, the command set is as follows:

```
al /link: CarLibraryPolicy.xml /out:policy.1.0.CarLibrary.dll
/keyf:C:\MyKey\myKey.snk /v:1.0.0.0
```

Here, the XML content is contained within a file named `CarLibraryPolicy.xml`. The name of the output file (which must be in the format *policy.<major>.<minor>.assemblyToConfigure*) is specified using the obvious `/out` flag. In addition, note that the name of the file containing the public/private key pair will also need to be supplied via the `/keyf` option. (Remember, publisher policy files are shared, and therefore must have a strong name!)

Once the `al.exe` tool has executed, the result is a new assembly that can be placed into the GAC to force all clients to bind to version 2.0.0.0 of `CarLibrary.dll`, without the use of a specific client application configuration file.

Disabling Publisher Policy

Now, assume you (as a system administrator) have deployed a publisher policy assembly (and the latest version of the related assembly) to a client machine. As luck would have it, nine of the ten affected applications rebind to version 2.0.0.0 without error. However, the remaining client application (for whatever reason) blows up when accessing `CarLibrary.dll` 2.0.0.0 (as we all know, it is next to impossible to build backward-compatible software that works 100 percent of the time).

In such a case, it is possible to build a configuration file for a specific troubled client that instructs the CLR to *ignore* the presence of any publisher policy files installed in the GAC. The remaining client applications that are happy to consume the newest .NET assembly will simply be redirected via the installed publisher policy assembly. To disable publisher policy on a client-by-client basis, author a (properly named) `*.config` file that makes use of the `<publisherPolicy>` element and set the `apply` attribute to `no`. When you do so, the CLR will load the version of the assembly originally listed in the client's manifest.

```
<configuration>
  <runtime>
    <assemblyBinding xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:asm.v1">
      <publisherPolicy apply="no" />
    </assemblyBinding>
  </runtime>
</configuration>
```

Understanding the <codeBase> Element

Application configuration files can also specify *code bases*. The `<codeBase>` element can be used to instruct the CLR to probe for dependent assemblies located at arbitrary locations (such as network share points, or simply a local directory outside a client's application directory).

■ **Note** If the value assigned to a `<codeBase>` element is located on a remote machine, the assembly will be downloaded on demand to a specific directory in the GAC termed the *download cache*. You can view the content of your machine's download cache by supplying the `/ldl` option to `gacutil.exe`.

Given what you have learned about deploying assemblies to the GAC, it should make sense that assemblies loaded from a `<codeBase>` element will need to be assigned a strong name (after all, how else could the CLR install remote assemblies to the GAC?).

■ **Note** Technically speaking, the `<codeBase>` element can be used to probe for assemblies that do not have a strong name. However, the assembly's location must be relative to the client's application directory (and thus is little more than an alternative to the `<privatePath>` element).

Create a console application named CodeBaseClient, set a reference to `CarLibrary.dll` version 2.0.0.0, and update the initial file as so:

```
using CarLibrary;

namespace CodeBaseClient
{
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with CodeBases *****");
            SportsCar c = new SportsCar();
            Console.WriteLine("Sports car has been allocated.");
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

Given that `CarLibrary.dll` has been deployed to the GAC, you are able to run the program as is. However, to illustrate the use of the `<codeBase>` element, create a new folder under your C drive (perhaps C:\MyAsms) and place a copy of `CarLibrary.dll` version 2.0.0.0 into this directory.

Now, add an `App.config` file to the CodeBaseClient project (as explained earlier in this chapter) and author the following XML content (remember that your `.publickeytoken` value will differ; consult your GAC as required):

```
<configuration>
  <runtime>
    <assemblyBinding xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:asm.v1">
      <dependentAssembly>
        <assemblyIdentity name="SharedAssembly" publicKeyToken="219ef380c9348a38" />
        <codeBase version="2.0.0.0" href="file:///C:\MyAsms\CarLibrary.dll" />
      </dependentAssembly>
    </assemblyBinding>
  </runtime>
</configuration>
```

As you can see, the `<codeBase>` element is nested within the `<assemblyIdentity>` element, which makes use of the `name` and `publicKeyToken` attributes to specify the friendly name as associated `publicKeyToken` values. The `<codeBase>` element itself specifies the version and location (via the `href` property) of the assembly to load. If you were to delete version 2.0.0.0 of `CarLibrary.dll` from the GAC, this client would still run successfully, as the CLR is able to resolve locate the external assembly under C:\MyAsms.

However, if you were to delete the MyAsms directory from your machine, the client would now fail. Clearly the `<codeBase>` elements (if present) take precedence over the investigation of the GAC.

■ **Note** If you place assemblies at random locations on your development machine, you are in effect re-creating the system registry (and the related DLL hell), given that if you move or rename the folder containing your binaries, the current bind will fail. Given this point, use `<codeBase>` with caution.

The `<codeBase>` element can also be helpful when referencing assemblies located on a remote networked machine. Assume you have permission to access a folder located at `http://www.IntertechTraining.com`. To download the remote `*.dll` to the GAC's download cache on your location machine, you could update the `<codeBase>` element as so:

```
<codeBase version="2.0.0.0"
href="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/Assemblies/CarLibrary.dll" />
```

■ **Source Code** The CodeBaseClient application can be found under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

The System.Configuration Namespace

Currently, all of the `*.config` files shown in this chapter have made use of well-known XML elements that are read by the CLR to resolve the location of external assemblies. In addition to these recognized elements, it is perfectly permissible for a client configuration file to contain application-specific data that has nothing to do with binding heuristics. Given this, it should come as no surprise that the .NET Framework provides a namespace that allows you to programmatically read the data within a client configuration file.

The `System.Configuration` namespace provides a small set of types you may use to read custom data from a client's `*.config` file. These custom settings must be contained within the scope of an `<appSettings>` element. The `<appSettings>` element contains any number of `<add>` elements that define a key/value pair to be obtained programmatically.

For example, assume you have a `*.config` file for a console application named AppConfigReaderApp that defines a database connection string and a point of data named `timesToSayHello`:

```
<configuration>
    <appSettings>
        <add key="appConStr"
            value="server=localhost;uid='sa';pwd='';database=Cars" />
        <add key="timesToSayHello" value="8" />
    </appSettings>
</configuration>
```

Reading these values for use by the client application is as simple as calling the instance-level `GetValue()` method of the `System.Configuration.AppSettingsReader` type. As shown in the following code, the first parameter to `GetValue()` is the name of the key in the `*.config` file, whereas the second parameter is the underlying type of the key (obtained via the C# `typeof` operator):

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        // Create a reader and get the connection string value.
        AppSettingsReader ar = new AppSettingsReader();
        Console.WriteLine(ar.GetValue("appConStr", typeof(string)));

        // Now get the number of times to say hello, and then do it!
        int numbOfTimes = (int)ar.GetValue("timesToSayHello", typeof(int));
        for(int i = 0; i < numbOfTimes; i++)
            Console.WriteLine("Yo!");
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

The `AppSettingsReader` class type does *not* provide a way to write application-specific data to a `*.config` file. While this may seem like a limitation at first encounter, it actually makes good sense. The whole idea of a `*.config` file is that it contains read-only data that is consulted by the CLR (or possibly the `AppSettingsReader` type) after an application has already been deployed to a target machine.

■ **Note** During our examination of ADO.NET (Chapter 22) you will learn about the new `<connectionStrings>` configuration element and new types within the `System.Configuration` namespace. These .NET 2.0–specific items provide a standard manner to handle connection string data.

■ **Source Code** The AppConfigReaderApp application can be found under the Chapter 11 subdirectory.

The Machine Configuration File

The configuration files you've examined in this chapter have a common theme: they apply only to a specific application (that is why they have the same name as the launching application). In addition, each .NET-aware machine has a file named `machine.config` that contains a vast number of configuration details (many of which have nothing to do with resolving external assemblies) that control how the .NET platform operates.

The .NET platform maintains a separate `*.config` file for each version of the framework installed on the local machine. The `machine.config` file for .NET 2.0 can be found under the C:\WINDOWS\Microsoft.NET\Framework\v2.0.50215\CONFIG directory (your version may differ). If you were to open this file, you would find numerous XML elements that control ASP.NET settings, various security details, debugging support, and so forth. However, if you wish to update the `machine.config` file with machinewide application settings (via an `<appSettings>` element), you are free to do so.

Although this file can be directly edited using Notepad, be warned that if you alter this file incorrectly, you may cripple the ability of the runtime to function correctly. This scenario can be far more painful than a malformed application `*.config` file, given that XML errors in an application configuration file affect only a single application, but erroneous XML in the `machine.config` file can break a specific version of the .NET platform.

The Assembly Binding "Big Picture"

Now that you have drilled down into the details regarding how the CLR resolves the location of requested external assemblies, remember that the simple case is, indeed, simple. Many (if not most) of your .NET applications will consist of nothing more than a group of private assemblies deployed to a single directory. In this case, simply copy the folder to a location of your choosing and run the client executable.

As you have seen, however, the CLR will check for client configuration files and publisher policy assemblies during the resolution process. To summarize the path taken by the CLR to resolve an external assembly reference, ponder Figure 11-29.

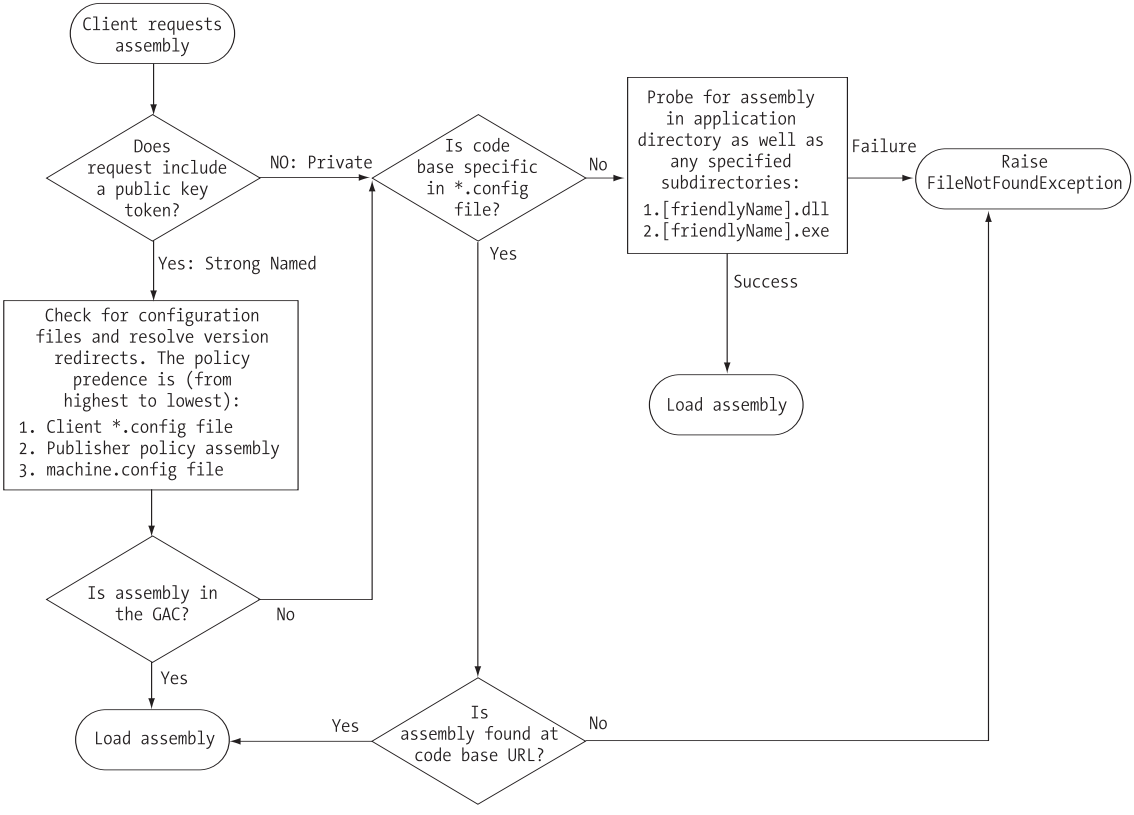


Figure 11-29. *Behold the CLR's path of assembly resolution.*

Summary

This chapter drilled down into the details of how the CLR resolves the location of externally referenced assemblies. You began by examining the content within an assembly: headers, metadata, manifests, and CIL. Then you constructed single-file and multifile assemblies and a handful of client applications (written in a language-agonistic manner).

As you have seen, assemblies may be private or shared. Private assemblies are copied to the client's subdirectory, whereas shared assemblies are deployed to the Global Assembly Cache (GAC), provided they have been assigned a strong name. Finally, has you have seen, private and shared assemblies can be configured using a client-side XML configuration file or, alternatively, via a publisher policy assembly.

CHAPTER 12

Type Reflection, Late Binding, and Attribute-Based Programming

As shown in the previous chapter, assemblies are the basic unit of deployment in the .NET universe. Using the integrated object browsers of Visual Studio 2005, you are able to examine the public types within a project's referenced set of assemblies. Furthermore, external tools such as `ildasm.exe` allow you to peek into the underlying CIL code, type metadata, and assembly manifest for a given .NET binary. In addition to this design-time investigation of .NET assemblies, you are also able to *programmatically* obtain this same information using the `System.Reflection` namespace. To this end, the first task of this chapter is to define the role of reflection and the necessity of .NET metadata.

The remainder of the chapter examines a number of closely related topics, all of which hinge upon reflection services. For example, you'll learn how a .NET client may employ dynamic loading and late binding to activate types it has no compile-time knowledge of. You'll also learn how to insert custom metadata into your .NET assemblies through the use of system-supplied and custom attributes. To put all of these (seemingly esoteric) topics into perspective, the chapter closes by demonstrating how to build several "snap-in objects" that you can plug into an extendable Windows Forms application.

The Necessity of Type Metadata

The ability to fully describe types (classes, interfaces, structures, enumerations, and delegates) using metadata is a key element of the .NET platform. Numerous .NET technologies, such as object serialization, .NET remoting, and XML web services, require the ability to discover the format of types at runtime. Furthermore, cross-language interoperability, compiler support, and an IDE's IntelliSense capabilities all rely on a concrete description of *type*.

Regardless of (or perhaps due to) its importance, metadata is not a new idea supplied by the .NET Framework. Java, CORBA, and COM all have similar concepts. For example, COM type libraries (which are little more than compiled IDL code) are used to describe the types contained within a COM server. Like COM, .NET code libraries also support type metadata. Of course, .NET metadata has no syntactic similarities to COM IDL. Recall that the `ildasm.exe` utility allows you to view an assembly's type metadata using the Ctrl+M keyboard option (see Chapter 1). Thus, if you were to open any of the `*.dll` or `*.exe` assemblies created over the course of this book (such as `CarLibrary.dll`) using `ildasm.exe` and press Ctrl+M, you would find the relevant type metadata (see Figure 12-1).

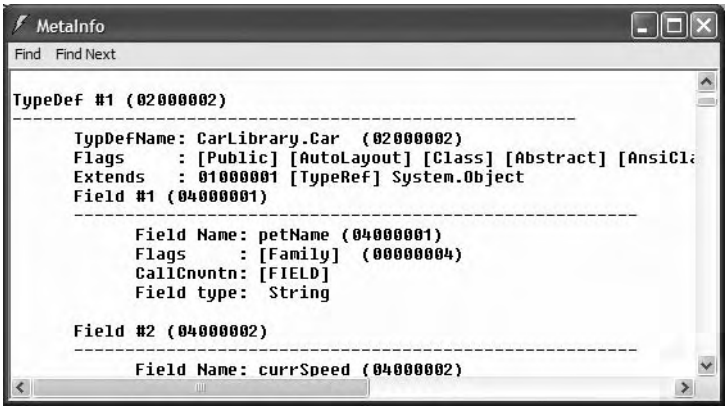


Figure 12-1. *Viewing an assembly's metadata*

As you can see, `ildasm.exe`'s display of .NET type metadata is very verbose (the actual binary format is much more compact). In fact, if I were to list the entire metadata description representing the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly, it would span several pages. Given that this act would be a woeful waste of your time (and paper), let's just glimpse into some key types of the `CarLibrary.dll` assembly.

Viewing (Partial) Metadata for the EngineState Enumeration

Each type defined within the current assembly is documented using a "`TypeDef #n`" token (where `TypeDef` is short for *type definition*). If the type being described uses a type defined within a separate .NET assembly, the referenced type is documented using a "`TypeRef #n`" token (where `TypeRef` is short for *type reference*). A `TypeRef` token is a pointer (if you will) to the referenced type's full metadata definition. In a nutshell, .NET metadata is a set of tables that clearly mark all type definitions (`TypeDefs`) and referenced entities (`TypeRefs`), all of which can be viewed using `ildasm.exe`'s metadata window.

As far as `CarLibrary.dll` goes, one `TypeDef` we encounter is the metadata description of the `CarLibrary.EngineState` enumeration (your number may differ; `TypeDef` numbering is based on the order in which the C# compiler processes the file):

```
TypeDef #1
-------------------------------------------------------
     TypDefName: CarLibrary.EngineState  (02000002)
     Flags     : [Public] [AutoLayout] [Class] [Sealed] [AnsiClass]  (00000101)
     Extends   : 01000001 [TypeRef] System.Enum
...
     Field #2
     -------------------------------------------------------
     Field Name: engineAlive (04000002)
     Flags     : [Public] [Static] [Literal] [HasDefault]  (00008056)
     DefltValue: (I4) 0
     CallCnvntn: [FIELD]
     Field type:  ValueClass CarLibrary.EngineState
...
```

Here, the `TypDefName` token is used to establish the name of the given type. The `Extends` metadata token is used to document the base class of a given .NET type (in this case, the referenced type, `System.Enum`). Each field of an enumeration is marked using the "`Field #n`" token. For brevity, I have simply listed the metadata for `EngineState.engineAlive`.

Viewing (Partial) Metadata for the Car Type

Here is a partial dump of the Car type that illustrates the following:

- How fields are defined in terms of .NET metadata
- How methods are documented via .NET metadata
- How a single type property is mapped to two discrete member functions

```
TypeDef #3
-------------------------------------------------------
     TypDefName: CarLibrary.Car  (02000004)
     Flags     : [Public] [AutoLayout] [Class] [Abstract] [AnsiClass]  (00100081)
     Extends   : 01000002 [TypeRef] System.Object
     Field #1
     -------------------------------------------------------
          Field Name: petName (04000008)
          Flags     : [Family]  (00000004)
          CallCnvntn: [FIELD]
          Field type:  String
...
     Method #1
     -------------------------------------------------------
          MethodName: .ctor (06000001)
          Flags     : [Public] [HideBySig] [ReuseSlot] [SpecialName]
          [RTSpecialName] [.ctor]  (00001886)
          RVA       : 0x00002050
          ImplFlags : [IL] [Managed]  (00000000)
          CallCnvntn: [DEFAULT]
          hasThis
          ReturnType: Void
          No arguments.
...
     Property #1
     -------------------------------------------------------
          Prop.Name : PetName (17000001)
          Flags     : [none] (00000000)
          CallCnvntn: [PROPERTY]
          hasThis
          ReturnType: String
          No arguments.
          DefltValue:
          Setter    : (06000004) set_PetName
          Getter    : (06000003) get_PetName
          0 Others
 ...
```

First, note that the Car class metadata marks the type's base class and includes various flags that describe how this type was constructed (e.g., [public], [abstract], and whatnot). Methods (such as our Car's constructor) are described in regard to their parameters, return value, and name. Finally, note how properties are mapped to their internal get/set methods using the .NET metadata Setter/Getter tokens. As you would expect, the derived Car types (SportsCar and MiniVan) are described in a similar manner.

Examining a TypeRef

Recall that an assembly's metadata will describe not only the set of internal types (`Car`, `EngineState`, etc.), but also any external types the internal types reference. For example, given that `CarLibrary.dll` has defined two enumerations, you find a `TypeRef` block for the `System.Enum` type:

```
TypeRef #1 (01000001)
-------------------------------------------------------
Token:             0x01000001
ResolutionScope:   0x23000001
TypeRefName:       System.Enum
     MemberRef #1
     -------------------------------------------------------
     Member: (0a00000f) ToString:
     CallCnvntn: [DEFAULT]
     hasThis
     ReturnType: String
      No arguments.
```

Documenting the Defining Assembly

The `ildasm.exe` metadata window also allows you to view the .NET metadata that describes the assembly itself using the `Assembly` token. As you can see from the following (partial) listing, information documented within the `Assembly` table is (surprise, surprise!) the same information that can be viewable via the MANIFEST icon. Here is a partial dump of the manifest of `CarLibrary.dll` (version 2.0.0.0):

```
Assembly
-------------------------------------------------------
     Token: 0x20000001
     Name : CarLibrary
     Public Key    : 00 24 00 00 04 80 00 00  // Etc...

     Hash Algorithm : 0x00008004
     Major Version: 0x00000002
     Minor Version: 0x00000000
     Build Number: 0x00000000
     Revision Number: 0x00000000
     Locale: <null>
     Flags : [SideBySideCompatible]  (00000000)
```

Documenting Referenced Assemblies

In addition to the `Assembly` token and the set of `TypeDef` and `TypeRef` blocks, .NET metadata also makes use of "`AssemblyRef #`*n*" tokens to document each external assembly. Given that the `CarLibrary.dll` makes use of the `MessageBox` type, you find an `AssemblyRef` for `System.Windows.Forms`, for example:

```
AssemblyRef #2
-------------------------------------------------------
    Token: 0x23000002
    Public Key or Token: b7 7a 5c 56 19 34 e0 89
    Name: System.Windows.Forms
    Version: 2.0.3600.0
    Major Version: 0x00000002
    Minor Version: 0x00000000
```

```
Build Number: 0x00000e10
Revision Number: 0x00000000
Locale: <null>
HashValue Blob:
Flags: [none] (00000000)
```

Documenting String Literals

The final point of interest regarding .NET metadata is the fact that each and every string literal in your code base is documented under the `User Strings` token, for example:

```
User Strings
-------------------------------------------------------
70000001 : (11) L"Car 2.0.0.0"
70000019 : (11) L"Jamming {0}"
70000031 : (13) L"Quiet time..."
7000004d : (14) L"Ramming speed!"
7000006b : (19) L"Faster is better..."
70000093 : (16) L"Time to call AAA"
700000b5 : (16) L"Your car is dead"
700000d7 : ( 9) L"Be quiet "
700000eb : ( 2) L"!!"
```

Now, don't be too concerned with the exact syntax of each and every piece of .NET metadata. The bigger point to absorb is that .NET metadata is very descriptive and lists each internally defined (and externally referenced) type found within a given code base.

The next question on your mind may be (in the best-case scenario) "How can I leverage this information in my applications?" or (in the worst-case scenario) "Why should I care about metadata?" To address both points of view, allow me to introduce .NET reflection services. Be aware that the usefulness of the topics presented over the pages that follow may be a bit of a head-scratcher until this chapter's endgame. So hang tight.

■ **Note** You will also find a number of `CustomAttribute` tokens displayed by the MetaInfo window, which documents the attributes applied within the code base. You'll learn about the role of .NET attributes later in this chapter.

Understanding Reflection

In the .NET universe, *reflection* is the process of runtime type discovery. Using reflection services, you are able to programmatically obtain the same metadata information displayed by `ildasm.exe` using a friendly object model. For example, through reflection, you can obtain a list of all types contained within a given assembly (or `*.netmodule`), including the methods, fields, properties, and events defined by a given type. You can also dynamically discover the set of interfaces supported by a given class (or structure), the parameters of a method, and other related details (base classes, namespace information, manifest data, and so forth).

Like any namespace, `System.Reflection` contains a number of related types. Table 12-1 lists some of the core items you should be familiar with.

Table 12-1. *A Sampling of Members of the* `System.Reflection` *Namespace*

Type	Meaning in Life
`Assembly`	This class (in addition to numerous related types) contains a number of methods that allow you to load, investigate, and manipulate an assembly.
`AssemblyName`	This class allows you to discover numerous details behind an assembly's identity (version information, culture information, and so forth).
`EventInfo`	This class holds information for a given event.
`FieldInfo`	This class holds information for a given field.
`MemberInfo`	This is the abstract base class that defines common behaviors for the `EventInfo`, `FieldInfo`, `MethodInfo`, and `PropertyInfo` types.
`MethodInfo`	This class contains information for a given method.
`Module`	This class allows you to access a given module within a multifile assembly.
`ParameterInfo`	This class holds information for a given parameter.
`PropertyInfo`	This class holds information for a given property.

To understand how to leverage the `System.Reflection` namespace to programmatically read .NET metadata, you need to first come to terms with the `System.Type` class.

The System.Type Class

The `System.Type` class defines a number of members that can be used to examine a type's metadata, a great number of which return types from the `System.Reflection` namespace. For example, `Type.GetMethods()` returns an array of `MethodInfo` types, `Type.GetFields()` returns an array of `FieldInfo` types, and so on. The complete set of members exposed by `System.Type` is quite expansive; however, Table 12-2 offers a partial snapshot of the members supported by `System.Type` (see the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details).

Table 12-2. *Select Members of* `System.Type`

Type	Meaning in Life

`IsAbstract`
`IsArray`
`IsClass`
`IsCOMObject`
`IsEnum`
`IsGenericTypeDefinition`
`IsGenericParameter`
`IsInterface`
`IsPrimitive`
`IsNestedPrivate`
`IsNestedPublic`
`IsSealed`
`IsValueType`
	These properties (among others) allow you to discover a number of basic traits about the `Type` you are referring to (e.g., if it is an abstract method, an array, a nested class, and so forth).

`GetConstructors()`
`GetEvents()`
`GetFields()`
`GetInterfaces()`
`GetMembers()`
`GetMethods()`
`GetNestedTypes()`
`GetProperties()`
	These methods (among others) allow you to obtain an array representing the items (interface, method, property, etc.) you are interested in. Each method returns a related array (e.g., `GetFields()` returns a `FieldInfo` array, `GetMethods()` returns a `MethodInfo` array, etc.). Be aware that each of these methods has a singular form (e.g., `GetMethod()`, `GetProperty()`, etc.) that allows you to retrieve a specific item by name, rather than an array of all related items.

Type	Meaning in Life
FindMembers()	This method returns an array of MemberInfo types based on search criteria.
GetType()	This static method returns a Type instance given a string name.
InvokeMember()	This method allows late binding to a given item.

Obtaining a Type Reference Using System.Object.GetType()

You can obtain an instance of the Type class in a variety of ways. However, the one thing you cannot do is directly create a Type object using the new keyword, as Type is an abstract class. Regarding your first choice, recall that System.Object defines a method named GetType(), which returns an instance of the Type class that represents the metadata for the current object:

```
// Obtain type information using a SportsCar instance.
SportsCar sc = new SportsCar();
Type t = sc.GetType();
```

Obviously, this approach will only work if you have compile-time knowledge of the type (SportsCar in this case). Given this restriction, it should make sense that tools such as ildasm.exe do not obtain type information by directly calling System.Object.GetType() for each type, given the ildasm.exe was not compiled against your custom assemblies!

Obtaining a Type Reference Using System.Type.GetType()

To obtain type information in a more flexible manner, you may call the static GetType() member of the System.Type class and specify the fully qualified string name of the type you are interested in examining. Using this approach, you do *not* need to have compile-time knowledge of the type you are extracting metadata from, given that Type.GetType() takes an instance of the omnipresent System.String.

The Type.GetType() method has been overloaded to allow you to specify two Boolean parameters, one of which controls whether an exception should be thrown if the type cannot be found, and the other of which establishes the case sensitivity of the string. To illustrate, ponder the following:

```
// Obtain type information using the static Type.GetType() method.
// (don't throw an exception if SportsCar cannot be found and ignore case).
Type t = Type.GetType("CarLibrary.SportsCar", false, true);
```

In the previous example, notice that the string you are passing into GetType() makes no mention of the assembly containing the type. In this case, the assumption is that the type is defined within the currently executing assembly. However, when you wish to obtain metadata for a type within an external private assembly, the string parameter is formatted using the type's fully qualified name, followed by the friendly name of the assembly containing the type (each of which is separated by a comma):

```
// Obtain type information for a type within an external assembly.
Type t = null;
t = Type.GetType("CarLibrary.SportsCar, CarLibrary");
```

As well, do know that the string passed into Type.GetType() may specify a plus token (+) to denote a *nested type*. Assume you wish to obtain type information for an enumeration (SpyOptions) nested within a class named JamesBondCar. To do so, you would write the following:

```
// Obtain type information for a nested enumeration
// within the current assembly.
Type t =
    Type.GetType("CarLibrary.JamesBondCar+SpyOptions");
```

Obtaining a Type Reference Using typeof()

The final way to obtain type information is using the C# `typeof` operator:

```
// Get the Type using typeof.
Type t = typeof(SportsCar);
```

Like `Type.GetType()`, the `typeof` operator is helpful in that you do not need to first create an object instance to extract type information. However, your code base must still have compile-time knowledge of the type you are interested in examining.

Building a Custom Metadata Viewer

To illustrate the basic process of reflection (and the usefulness of `System.Type`), let's create a console application named `MyTypeViewer`. This program will display details of the methods, properties, fields, and supported interfaces (in addition to some other points of interest) for any type within `mscorlib.dll` (recall all .NET applications have automatic access to this core framework class library) or a type within `MyTypeViewer` itself.

Reflecting on Methods

The `Program` class will be updated to define a number of static methods, each of which takes a single `System.Type` parameter and returns `void`. First you have `ListMethods()`, which (as you might guess) prints the name of each method defined by the incoming type. Notice how `Type.GetMethods()` returns an array of `System.Reflection.MethodInfo` types:

```
// Display method names of type.
public static void ListMethods(Type t)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Methods *****");
     MethodInfo[] mi = t.GetMethods();
     foreach(MethodInfo m in mi)
          Console.WriteLine("->{0}", m.Name);
     Console.WriteLine("");
}
```

Here, you are simply printing the name of the method using the `MethodInfo.Name` property. As you might guess, `MethodInfo` has many additional members that allow you to determine if the method is static, virtual, or abstract. As well, the `MethodInfo` type allows you to obtain the method's return value and parameter set. You'll spruce up the implementation of `ListMethods()` in just a bit.

Reflecting on Fields and Properties

The implementation of `ListFields()` is similar. The only notable difference is the call to `Type.GetFields()` and the resulting `FieldInfo` array. Again, to keep things simple, you are printing out only the name of each field.

```
// Display field names of type.
public static void ListFields(Type t)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fields *****");
     FieldInfo[] fi = t.GetFields();
     foreach(FieldInfo field in fi)
          Console.WriteLine("->{0}", field.Name);
     Console.WriteLine("");
}
```

The logic to display a type's properties is similar:

```
// Display property names of type.
public static void ListProps(Type t)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Properties *****");
     PropertyInfo[] pi = t.GetProperties();
     foreach(PropertyInfo prop in pi)
          Console.WriteLine("->{0}", prop.Name);
     Console.WriteLine("");
}
```

Reflecting on Implemented Interfaces

Next, you will author a method named `ListInterfaces()` that will print out the names of any interfaces supported on the incoming type. The only point of interest here is that the call to `GetInterfaces()` returns an array of `System.Type`s! This should make sense given that interfaces are, indeed, types:

```
// Display implemented interfaces.
public static void ListInterfaces(Type t)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Interfaces *****");
     Type[] ifaces = t.GetInterfaces();
     foreach(Type i in ifaces)
          Console.WriteLine("->{0}", i.Name);
}
```

Displaying Various Odds and Ends

Last but not least, you have one final helper method that will simply display various statistics (indicating whether the type is generic, what the base class is, whether the type is sealed, and so forth) regarding the incoming type:

```
// Just for good measure.
public static void ListVariousStats(Type t)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Various Statistics *****");
     Console.WriteLine("Base class is: {0}", t.BaseType);
     Console.WriteLine("Is type abstract? {0}", t.IsAbstract);
     Console.WriteLine("Is type sealed? {0}", t.IsSealed);
     Console.WriteLine("Is type generic? {0}", t.IsGenericTypeDefinition);
     Console.WriteLine("Is type a class type? {0}", t.IsClass);
     Console.WriteLine("");
}
```

Implementing Main()

The `Main()` method of the `Program` class prompts the user for the fully qualified name of a type. Once you obtain this string data, you pass it into the `Type.GetType()` method and send the extracted `System.Type` into each of your helper methods. This process repeats until the user enters **Q** to terminate the application:

```
// Need to make use of the reflection namespace.
using System;
using System.Reflection;
...
static void Main(string[] args)
```

```
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Welcome to MyTypeViewer *****");
    string typeName = "";
    bool userIsDone = false;

    do
    {
        Console.WriteLine("\nEnter a type name to evaluate");
        Console.Write("or enter Q to quit: ");

        // Get name of type.
        typeName = Console.ReadLine();

        // Does user want to quit?
        if (typeName.ToUpper() == "Q")
        {
            userIsDone = true;
            break;
        }

        // Try to display type.
        try
        {
            Type t = Type.GetType(typeName);
            Console.WriteLine("");
            ListVariousStats(t);
            ListFields(t);
            ListProps(t);
            ListMethods(t);
            ListInterfaces(t);
        }
        catch
        {
            Console.WriteLine("Sorry, can't find type");
        }
    } while (!userIsDone);
}
```

At this point, `MyTypeViewer.exe` is ready to take out for a test drive. For example, run your application and enter the following fully qualified names (be aware that the manner in which you invoked `Type.GetType()` requires case-sensitive string names):

- `System.Int32`
- `System.Collections.ArrayList`
- `System.Threading.Thread`
- `System.Void`
- `System.IO.BinaryWriter`
- `System.Math`
- `System.Console`
- `MyTypeViewer.Program`

Figure 12-2 shows the partial output when specifying `System.Math`.

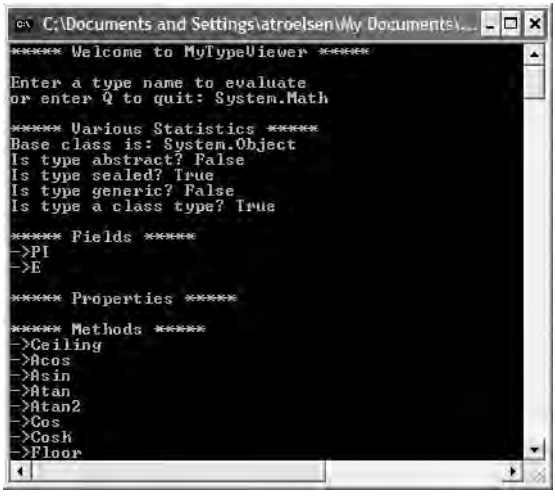


Figure 12-2. *Reflecting on* `System.Math`

Reflecting on Method Parameters and Return Values

So far, so good! Let's make one minor enhancement to the current application. Specifically, you will update the `ListMethods()` helper function to list not only the name of a given method, but also the return value and incoming parameters. The `MethodInfo` type provides the `ReturnType` property and `GetParameters()` method for these very tasks. In the following code, notice that you are building a string type that contains the type and name of each parameter using a nested `foreach` loop:

```
public static void ListMethods(Type t)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Methods *****");
    MethodInfo[] mi = t.GetMethods();
    foreach (MethodInfo m in mi)
    {
        // Get return value.
        string retVal = m.ReturnType.FullName;
        string paramInfo = "(";

        // Get params.
        foreach (ParameterInfo pi in m.GetParameters())
        {
            paramInfo += string.Format("{0} {1} ", pi.ParameterType, pi.Name);
        }
        paramInfo += ")";

        // Now display the basic method sig.
        Console.WriteLine("->{0} {1} {2}", retVal, m.Name, paramInfo);
    }
    Console.WriteLine("");
}
```

If you now run this updated application, you will find that the methods of a given type are much more detailed. Figure 12-3 shows the method metadata of the `System.Globalization.GregorianCalendar` type.

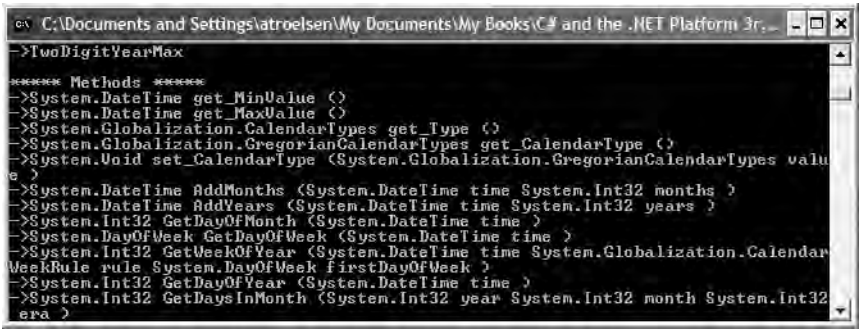

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Platform 3r...
->TwoDigitYearMax
***** Methods *****
->System.DateTime get_MinValue ()
->System.DateTime get_MaxValue ()
->System.Globalization.CalendarTypes get_Type ()
->System.Globalization.GregorianCalendarTypes get_CalendarType ()
->System.Void set_CalendarType (System.Globalization.GregorianCalendarTypes valu
e)
->System.DateTime AddMonths (System.DateTime time System.Int32 months)
->System.DateTime AddYears (System.DateTime time System.Int32 years)
->System.Int32 GetDayOfMonth (System.DateTime time)
->System.DayOfWeek GetDayOfWeek (System.DateTime time)
->System.Int32 GetWeekOfYear (System.DateTime time System.Globalization.Calendar
WeekRule rule System.DayOfWeek firstDayOfWeek)
->System.Int32 GetDayOfYear (System.DateTime time)
->System.Int32 GetDaysInMonth (System.Int32 year System.Int32 month System.Int32
era)

Figure 12-3. *Method details of* `System.Globalization.GregorianCalendar`

Interesting stuff, huh? Clearly the `System.Reflection` namespace and `System.Type` class allow you to reflect over many other aspects of a type beyond what `MyTypeViewer` is currently displaying. As you would hope, you can obtain a type's events, discover which interfaces have been implemented explicitly, get the list of any generic parameters for a given member, and glean dozens of other details.

Nevertheless, at this point you have created an (somewhat capable) object browser. The major limitation, of course, is that you have no way to reflect beyond the current assembly (`MyTypeViewer`) or the always accessible `mscorlib.dll`. This begs the question, "How can I build applications that can load (and reflect over) assemblies not known at compile time?"

■ **Source Code** The MyTypeViewer project can be found under the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Dynamically Loading Assemblies

In the previous chapter, you learned all about how the CLR consults the assembly manifest when probing for an externally referenced assembly. While this is all well and good, there will be many times when you need to load assemblies on the fly programmatically, even if there is no record of said assembly in the manifest. Formally speaking, the act of loading external assemblies on demand is known as a *dynamic load*.

`System.Reflection` defines a class named `Assembly`. Using this type, you are able to dynamically load an assembly as well as discover properties about the assembly itself. Using the `Assembly` type, you are able to dynamically load private or shared assemblies, as well as load an assembly located at an arbitrary location. In essence, the `Assembly` class provides methods (`Load()` and `LoadFrom()` in particular) that allow you to programmatically supply the same sort of information found in a client-side `*.config` file.

To illustrate dynamic loading, create a brand-new console application named `ExternalAssemblyReflector`. Your task is to construct a `Main()` method that prompts for the friendly name of an assembly to load dynamically. You will pass the `Assembly` reference into a helper method named `DisplayTypes()`, which will simply print the names of each class, interface, structure, enumeration, and delegate it contains. The code is refreshingly simple:

```
using System;
using System.Reflection;
using System.IO;  // For FileNotFoundException definition.
```

```
namespace ExternalAssemblyReflector
{
    class Program
    {
        static void DisplayTypesInAsm(Assembly asm)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("\n***** Types in Assembly *****");
            Console.WriteLine("->{0}", asm.FullName);
            Type[] types = asm.GetTypes();
            foreach (Type t in types)
                Console.WriteLine("Type: {0}", t);
            Console.WriteLine("");
        }

        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** External Assembly Viewer *****");

            string asmName = "";
            bool userIsDone = false;
            Assembly asm = null;

            do
            {
                Console.WriteLine("\nEnter an assembly to evaluate");
                Console.Write("or enter Q to quit: ");

                // Get name of assembly.
                asmName = Console.ReadLine();

                // Does user want to quit?
                if (asmName.ToUpper() == "Q")
                {
                    userIsDone = true;
                    break;
                }

                // Try to load assembly.
                try
                {
                    asm = Assembly.Load(asmName);
                    DisplayTypesInAsm(asm);
                }
                catch
                {
                    Console.WriteLine("Sorry, can't find assembly.");
                }
            } while (!userIsDone);
        }
    }
}
```

Notice that the static `Assembly.Load()` method has been passed only the friendly name of the assembly you are interested in loading into memory. Thus, if you wish to reflect over `CarLibrary.dll`, you will need to copy the `CarLibrary.dll` binary to the `\Bin\Debug` directory of the `ExternalAssemblyReflector` application to run this program. Once you do, you will find output similar to Figure 12-4.

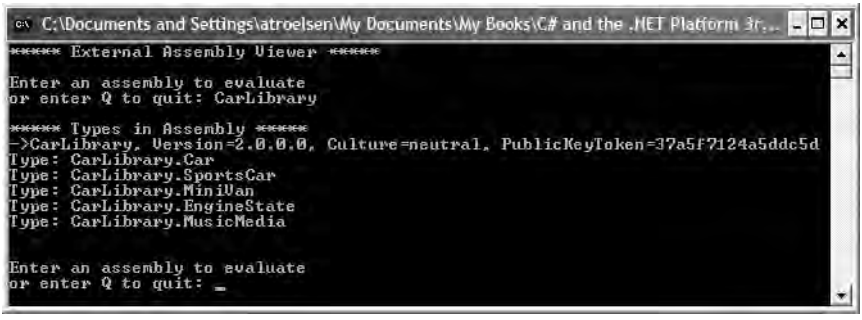

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Platform 3r...
***** External Assembly Viewer *****
Enter an assembly to evaluate
or enter Q to quit: CarLibrary
***** Types in Assembly *****
->CarLibrary, Version=2.0.0.0, Culture=neutral, PublicKeyToken=37a5f7124a5ddc5d
Type: CarLibrary.Car
Type: CarLibrary.SportsCar
Type: CarLibrary.MiniVan
Type: CarLibrary.EngineState
Type: CarLibrary.MusicMedia
Enter an assembly to evaluate
or enter Q to quit:

Figure 12-4. *Reflecting on the external CarLibrary assembly*

■ **Note** If you wish to make ExternalAssemblyReflector more flexible, load the external assembly using `Assembly.LoadFrom()` rather than `Assembly.Load()`. By doing so, you can enter an absolute path to the assembly you wish to view (e.g., C:\MyApp\MyAsm.dll).

■ **Source Code** The ExternalAssemblyReflector project is included in the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Reflecting on Shared Assemblies

As you may suspect, `Assembly.Load()` has been overloaded a number of times. One variation of the `Assembly.Load()` method allows you to specify a culture value (for localized assemblies) as well as a version number and public key token value (for shared assemblies).

Collectively speaking, the set of items identifying an assembly is termed the *display name*. The format of a display name is a comma-delimited string of name/value pairs that begins with the friendly name of the assembly, followed by optional qualifiers (that may appear in any order). Here is the template to follow (optional items appear in parentheses):

```
Name (,Culture = culture token) (,Version = major.minor.build.revision)
(,PublicKeyToken= public key token)
```

When you're crafting a display name, the convention `PublicKeyToken=null` indicates that binding and matching against a non–strongly-named assembly is required. Additionally, `Culture=""` indicates matching against the default culture of the target machine, for example:

```
// Load version 1.0.982.23972 of CarLibrary using the default culture.
Assembly a = Assembly.Load(
  @"CarLibrary, Version=1.0.982.23972, PublicKeyToken=null, Culture="""");
```

Also be aware that the `System.Reflection` namespace supplies the `AssemblyName` type, which allows you to represent the preceding string information in a handy object variable. Typically, this class is used in conjunction with `System.Version`, which is an OO wrapper around an assembly's version number. Once you have established the display name, it can then be passed into the overloaded `Assembly.Load()` method:

```
// Make use of AssemblyName to define the display name.
AssemblyName asmName;
```

```
asmName = new AssemblyName();
asmName.Name = "CarLibrary";
Version v = new Version("1.0.982.23972");
asmName.Version = v;
Assembly a = Assembly.Load(asmName);
```

To load a shared assembly from the GAC, the `Assembly.Load()` parameter must specify a `publickeytoken` value. For example, assume you wish to load version 2.0.0.0 of the `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assembly provided by the .NET base class libraries. Given that the number of types in this assembly is quite large, the following application simply prints out the names of the first 20 types:

```
using System;
using System.Reflection;
using System.IO;

namespace SharedAsmReflector
{
    public class SharedAsmReflector
    {
        private static void DisplayInfo(Assembly a)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** Info about Assembly *****");
            Console.WriteLine("Loaded from GAC? {0}", a.GlobalAssemblyCache);
            Console.WriteLine("Asm Name: {0}", a.GetName().Name);
            Console.WriteLine("Asm Version: {0}", a.GetName().Version);
            Console.WriteLine("Asm Culture: {0}",
                 a.GetName().CultureInfo.DisplayName);

            Type[] types = a.GetTypes();
            for(int i = 0; i < 20; i++)
                Console.WriteLine("Type: {0}", types[i]);
        }

        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** The Shared Asm Reflector App *****\n");

            // Load System.Windows.Forms.dll from GAC.
            string displayName = null;
            displayName = "System.Windows.Forms," +
                "Version=2.0.0.0," +
                "PublicKeyToken=b77a5c561934e089" +
                @"Culture="""";
                Assembly asm = Assembly.Load(displayName);
            DisplayInfo(asm);
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

Source Code The SharedAsmReflector project is included in the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Sweet! At this point you should understand how to use some of the core items defined within the `System.Reflection` namespace to discover metadata at runtime. Of course, I realize despite the

"cool factor," you likely will not need to build custom object browsers at your place of employment. Do recall, however, that reflection services are the foundation for a number of very common programming activities, including *late binding*.

Understanding Late Binding

Simply put, *late binding* is a technique in which you are able to create an instance of a given type and invoke its members at runtime without having compile-time knowledge of its existence. When you are building an application that binds late to a type in an external assembly, you have no reason to set a reference to the assembly; therefore, the caller's manifest has no direct listing of the assembly.

At first glance, you may not understand the value of late binding. It is true that if you can "bind early" to a type (e.g., set an assembly reference and allocate the type using the C# `new` keyword), you should opt to do so. For one reason, early binding allows you to determine errors at compile time, rather than at runtime. Nevertheless, late binding does have a critical role in any extendable application you may be building.

The System.Activator Class

The `System.Activator` class is the key to .NET late binding process. Beyond the methods inherited from `System.Object`, `Activator` defines only a small set of members, many of which have to do with .NET remoting (see Chapter 18). For our current example, we are only interested in the `Activator.CreateInstance()` method, which is used to create an instance of a type à la late binding.

This method has been overloaded numerous times to provide a good deal of flexibility. The simplest variation of the `CreateInstance()` member takes a valid `Type` object that describes the entity you wish to allocate on the fly. Create a new application named LateBinding, and update the `Main()` method as so (be sure to place a copy of `CarLibrary.dll` in the project's `\Bin\Debug` directory):

```
// Create a type dynamically.
public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          // Try to load a local copy of CarLibrary.
          Assembly a = null;
          try
          {
               a = Assembly.Load("CarLibrary");
          }
          catch(FileNotFoundException e)
          {
               Console.WriteLine(e.Message);
               Console.ReadLine();
               return;
          }

          // Get metadata for the Minivan type.
          Type miniVan = a.GetType("CarLibrary.MiniVan");

          // Create the Minivan on the fly.
          object obj = Activator.CreateInstance(miniVan);
     }
}
```

Notice that the `Activator.CreateInstance()` method returns a generic `System.Object` rather than a strongly typed `MiniVan`. Therefore, if you apply the dot operator on the `obj` variable, you will fail to see any members of the `MiniVan` type. At first glance, you may assume you can remedy this problem with an explicit cast; however, this program has no clue what a `MiniVan` is in the first place!

Remember that the whole point of late binding is to create instances of objects for which there is no compile-time knowledge. Given this, how can you invoke the underlying methods of the `MiniVan` object stored in the `System.Object` variable? The answer, of course, is by using reflection.

Invoking Methods with No Parameters

Assume you wish to invoke the `TurboBoost()` method of the `MiniVan`. As you recall, this method will set the state of the engine to "dead" and display an informational message box. The first step is to obtain a `MethodInfo` type for the `TurboBoost()` method using `Type.GetMethod()`. From the resulting `MethodInfo`, you are then able to call `MiniVan.TurboBoost` using `Invoke()`. `MethodInfo.Invoke()` requires you to send in all parameters that are to be given to the method represented by `MethodInfo`. These parameters are represented by an array of `System.Object` types (as the parameters for a given method could be any number of various entities).

Given that `TurboBoost()` does not require any parameters, you can simply pass `null` (meaning "this method has no parameters"). Update your `Main()` method as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Try to load a local copy of CarLibrary.
    ...

    // Get the MiniVan type.
    Type miniVan = a.GetType("CarLibrary.MiniVan");

    // Create the MiniVan on the fly.
    object obj = Activator.CreateInstance(miniVan);

    // Get info for TurboBoost.
    MethodInfo mi = miniVan.GetMethod("TurboBoost");

    // Invoke method ('null' for no parameters).
    mi.Invoke(obj, null);
}
```

At this point you are happy to see the message box in Figure 12-5.



Figure 12-5. *Late-bound method invocation*

Invoking Methods with Parameters

To illustrate how to dynamically invoke a method that does take some number of parameters, assume the `MiniVan` type defines a method named `TellChildToBeQuiet()`:

```
// Quiet down the troops...
public void TellChildToBeQuiet(string kidName, int shameIntensity)
{
     for(int i = 0 ; i < shameIntensity; i++)
          MessageBox.Show("Be quiet {0} !!", kidName);
}
```

`TellChildToBeQuiet()` takes two parameters: a string representing the child's name and an integer representing your current level of frustration. When using late binding, parameters are packaged as an array of `System.Objects`. To invoke the new method, add the following code to your `Main()` method:

```
// Bind late to a method taking params.
object[] paramArray = new object[2];
paramArray[0] = "Fred";  // Child name.
paramArray[1] = 4;       // Shame Intensity.
mi = miniVan.GetMethod("TellChildToBeQuiet");
mi.Invoke(obj, paramArray);
```

If you run this program, you will see four message boxes pop up, shaming young Fred. Hopefully at this point you can see the relationships among reflection, dynamic loading, and late binding. Again, you still may wonder exactly *when* you might make use of these techniques in your own applications. The conclusion of this chapter should shed light on this question; however, the next topic under investigation is the role of .NET attributes.

■ **Source Code** The LateBinding project is included in the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Understanding Attributed Programming

As illustrated at beginning of this chapter, one role of a .NET compiler is to generate metadata descriptions for all defined and referenced types. In addition to this standard metadata contained within any assembly, the .NET platform provides a way for programmers to embed additional metadata into an assembly using *attributes*. In a nutshell, attributes are nothing more than code annotations that can be applied to a given type (class, interface, structure, etc.), member (property, method, etc.), assembly, or module.

The idea of annotating code using attributes is not new. COM IDL provided numerous predefined attributes that allowed developers to describe the types contained within a given COM server. However, COM attributes were little more than a set of keywords. If a COM developer needed to create a custom attribute, they could do so, but it was referenced in code by a 128-bit number (GUID), which was cumbersome at best.

Unlike COM IDL attributes (which again were simply keywords), .NET attributes are class types that extend the abstract `System.Attribute` base class. As you explore the .NET namespaces, you will find many predefined attributes that you are able to make use of in your applications. Furthermore, you are free to build custom attributes to further qualify the behavior of your types by creating a new type deriving from `Attribute`.

Understand that when you apply attributes in your code, the embedded metadata is essentially useless until another piece of software explicitly reflects over the information. If this is not the case, the blurb of metadata embedded within the assembly is ignored and completely harmless.

Attribute Consumers

As you would guess, the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK ships with numerous utilities that are indeed on the lookout for various attributes. The C# compiler (`csc.exe`) itself has been preprogrammed to dis-

cover the presence of various attributes during the compilation cycle. For example, if the C# compiler encounters the `[CLSCompilant]` attribute, it will automatically check the attributed item to ensure it is exposing only CLS-compliant constructs. By way of another example, if the C# compiler discovers an item attributed with the `[Obsolete]` attribute, it will display a compiler warning in the Visual Studio 2005 Error List window.

In addition to development tools, numerous methods in the .NET base class libraries are pre-programmed to reflect over specific attributes. For example, if you wish to persist the state of an object to file, all you are required to do is annotate your class with the `[Serializable]` attribute. If the `Serialize()` method of the `BinaryFormatter` class encounters this attribute, the object is automatically persisted to file in a compact binary format.

The .NET CLR is also on the prowl for the presence of certain attributes. Perhaps the most famous .NET attribute is `[WebMethod]`. If you wish to expose a method via HTTP requests and automatically encode the method return value as XML, simply apply `[WebMethod]` to the method and the CLR handles the details. Beyond web service development, attributes are critical to the operation of the .NET security system, .NET remoting layer, and COM/.NET interoperability (and so on).

Finally, you are free to build applications that are programmed to reflect over your own custom attributes as well as any attribute in the .NET base class libraries. By doing so, you are essentially able to create a set of "keywords" that are understood by a specific set of assemblies.

Applying Predefined Attributes in C#

As previously mentioned, the .NET base class library provides a number of attributes in various namespaces. Table 12-3 gives a snapshot of some—but by *absolutely* no means all—predefined attributes.

Table 12-3. *A Tiny Sampling of Predefined Attributes*

Attribute	Meaning in Life
`[CLSCompliant]`	Enforces the annotated item to conform to the rules of the Common Language Specification (CLS). Recall that CLS-compliant types are guaranteed to be used seamlessly across all .NET programming languages.
`[DllImport]`	Allows .NET code to make calls to any unmanaged C- or C++-based code library, including the API of the underlying operating system. Do note that `[DllImport]` is not used when communicating with COM-based software.
`[Obsolete]`	Marks a deprecated type or member. If other programmers attempt to use such an item, they will receive a compiler warning describing the error of their ways.
`[Serializable]`	Marks a class or structure as being "serializable."
`[NonSerialized]`	Specifies that a given field in a class or structure should not be persisted during the serialization process.
`[WebMethod]`	Marks a method as being invokable via HTTP requests and instructs the CLR to serialize the method return value as XML (see Chapter 25 for complete details).

To illustrate the process of applying attributes in C#, assume you wish build a class named `Motorcycle` that can be persisted in a binary format. To do so, simply apply the `[Serializable]` attribute to the class definition. If you have a field that should not be persisted, you may apply the `[NonSerialized]` attribute:

```
// This class can be saved to disk.
[Serializable]
public class Motorcycle
{
     // However this field will not be persisted.
     [NonSerialized]
     float weightOfCurrentPassengers;

     // These fields are still serializable.
     bool hasRadioSystem;
     bool hasHeadSet;
     bool hasSissyBar;
}
```

■ **Note** An attribute only applies to the "very next" item. For example, the only nonserialized field of the `Motorcycle` class is `weightOfCurrentPassengers`. The remaining fields are serializable given that the entire class has been annotated with `[Serializable]`.

At this point, don't concern yourself with the actual process of object serialization (Chapter 17 examines the details). Just notice that when you wish to apply an attribute, the name of the attribute is sandwiched between square brackets.

Once this class has been compiled, you can view the extra metadata using `ildasm.exe`. Notice that these attributes are recorded using the `serializable` and `notserialized` tokens (see Figure 12-6).

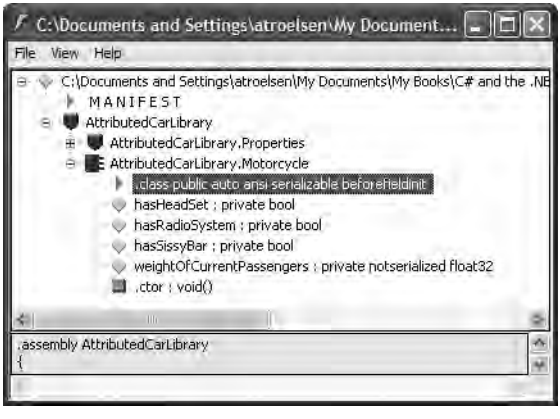


Figure 12-6. *Attributes shown in* `ildasm.exe`

As you might guess, a single item can be attributed with multiple attributes. Assume you have a legacy C# class type (`HorseAndBuggy`) that was marked as serializable, but is now considered obsolete for current development. To apply multiple attributes to a single item, simply use a comma-delimited list:

```
[Serializable,
Obsolete("This class is obsolete, use another vehicle!")]
public class HorseAndBuggy
{
     // ...
```

As an alternative, you can also apply multiple attributes on a single item by stacking each attribute as so (the end result is identical):

```
[Serializable]
[Obsolete("This class is obsolete, use another vehicle!")]
public class HorseAndBuggy
{
    // ...
}
```

Specifying Constructor Parameters for Attributes

Notice that the `[Obsolete]` attribute is able to accept what appears to be a constructor parameter. If you view the formal definition of the `[Obsolete]` attribute using the Code Definition window of Visual Studio 2005, you will find that this class indeed provides a constructor receiving a `System.String`:

```
public sealed class ObsoleteAttribute : System.Attribute
{
    public bool IsError { get; }
    public string Message { get; }
    public ObsoleteAttribute(string message, bool error);
    public ObsoleteAttribute(string message);
    public ObsoleteAttribute();
}
```

Understand that when you supply constructor parameters to an attribute, the attribute is *not* allocated into memory until they parameters are reflected upon by another type or an external tool. The string data defined at the attribute level is simply stored within the assembly as a blurb of metadata.

The Obsolete Attribute in Action

Now that `HorseAndBuggy` has been marked as obsolete, if you were to allocate an instance of this type, you would find that the supplied string data is extracted and displayed within the Error List window of Visual Studio 2005 (see Figure 12-7).

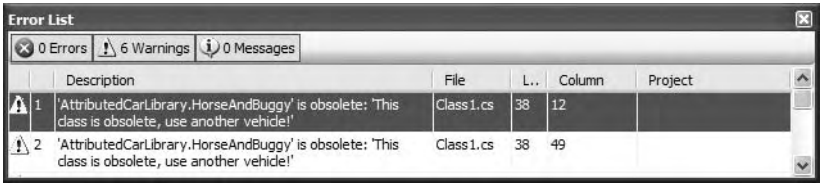


Figure 12-7. *Attributes in action*

In this case, the "other piece of software" that is reflecting on the `[Obsolete]` attribute is the C# compiler.

C# Attribute Shorthand Notation

If you were reading closely, you may have noticed that the actual class name of the `[Obsolete]` attribute is `ObsoleteAttribute`, not `Obsolete`. As a naming convention, all .NET attributes (including custom attributes you may create yourself) are suffixed with the "Attribute" token. However, to

simplify the process of applying attributes, the C# language does not require you to type in the `Attribute` suffix. Given this, the following iteration of the `HorseAndBuggy` type is identical to the previous (it just involves a few more keystrokes):

```
[SerializableAttribute]
[ObsoleteAttribute("This class is obsolete, use another vehicle!")]
public class HorseAndBuggy
{
     // ...
}
```

Be aware that this is a courtesy provided by C#. Not all .NET-enabled languages support this feature. In any case, at this point you should hopefully understand the following key points regarding .NET attributes:

- Attributes are classes that derive from `System.Attribute`.
- Attributes result in embedded metadata.
- Attributes are basically useless until another agent reflects upon them.
- Attributes are applied in C# using square brackets.

Next up, let's examine how you can build your own custom attributes and a piece of custom software that reflects over the embedded metadata.

Building Custom Attributes

The first step in building a custom attribute is to create a new class deriving from `System.Attribute`. Keeping in step with the automobile theme used throughout this book, assume you have created a brand new C# class library named `AttributedCarLibrary`. This assembly will define a handful of vehicles (some of which you have already seen in this text), each of which is described using a custom attribute named `VehicleDescriptionAttribute`:

```
// A custom attribute.
public sealed class VehicleDescriptionAttribute : System.Attribute
{
     private string msgData;

     public VehicleDescriptionAttribute(string description)
     { msgData = description;}
     public VehicleDescriptionAttribute(){ }

     public string Description
     {
          get { return msgData; }
          set { msgData = value; }
     }
}
```

As you can see, `VehicleDescriptionAttribute` maintains a private internal string (`msgData`) that can be set using a custom constructor and manipulated using a type property (`Description`). Beyond the fact that this class derived from `System.Attribute`, there is nothing unique to this class definition.

■ **Note** For security reasons, it is considered a .NET best practice to design all custom attributes as sealed.

Applying Custom Attributes

Given that `VehicleDescriptionAttribute` is derived from `System.Attribute`, you are now able to annotate your vehicles as you see fit:

```
// Assign description using a 'named property'.
[Serializable,
VehicleDescription(Description = "My rocking Harley")]
public class Motorcycle
{
    // ...
}

[SerializableAttribute]
[ObsoleteAttribute("This class is obsolete, use another vehicle!"),
VehicleDescription("The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be...")]
public class HorseAndBuggy
{
    // ...
}

[VehicleDescription("A very long, slow, but feature-rich auto")]
public class Winnebago
{
    // ...
}
```

Notice that the description of the `Motorcycle` is assigned a description using a new bit of attribute-centric syntax termed a *named property*. In the constructor of the first `[VehicleDescription]` attribute, you set the underlying `System.String` using a name/value pair. If this attribute is reflected upon by an external agent, the value is fed into the `Description` property (named property syntax is legal only if the attribute supplies a writable .NET property). In contrast, the `HorseAndBuggy` and `Winnebago` types are not making use of named property syntax and are simply passing the string data via the custom constructor.

Once you compile the AttributedCarLibrary assembly, you can make use of `ildasm.exe` to view the injected metadata descriptions for your type. For example, here is an embedded description of the `Winnebago` type (see Figure 12-8).

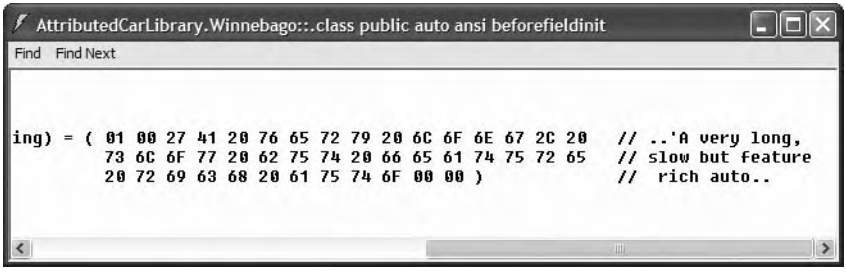

AttributedCarLibrary.Winnebago::.class public auto ansi beforefieldinit
Find Find Next
ing) = (01 00 27 41 20 76 65 72 79 20 6C 6F 6E 67 2C 20 // ..'A very long,
73 6C 6F 77 20 62 75 74 20 66 65 61 74 75 72 65 // slow but feature
20 72 69 63 68 20 61 75 74 6F 00 00) // rich auto..

Figure 12-8. *Embedded vehicle description data*

Restricting Attribute Usage

By default, custom attributes can be applied to just about any aspect of your code (methods, classes, properties, and so on). Thus, if it made sense to do so, you could use `VehicleDescription` to qualify methods, properties, or fields (among other things):

```
[VehicleDescription("A very long, slow, but feature-rich auto")]
public class Winnebago
{
     [VehicleDescription("My rocking CD player")]
     public void PlayMusic(bool On)
     {
          ...
     }
}
```

In some cases, this is exactly the behavior you require. Other times, however, you may want to build a custom attribute that can be applied only to select code elements. If you wish to constrain the scope of a custom attribute, you will need to apply the `[AttributeUsage]` attribute on the definition of your custom attribute. The `[AttributeUsage]` attribute allows you to supply any combination of values (via an OR operation) from the `AttributeTargets` enumeration:

```
// This enumeration defines the possible targets of an attribute.
public enum AttributeTargets
{
     All, Assembly, Class, Constructor,
     Delegate, Enum, Event, Field,
     Interface, Method, Module, Parameter,
     Property, ReturnValue, Struct
}
```

Furthermore, `[AttributeUsage]` also allows you to optionally set a named property (`AllowMultiple`) that specifies whether the attribute can be applied more than once on the same item. As well, `[AttributeUsage]` allows you to establish whether the attribute should be inherited by derived classes using the `Inherited` named property.

To establish that the `[VehicleDescription]` attribute can be applied only once on a class or structure (and the value is not inherited by derived types), you can update the `VehicleDescriptionAttribute` definition as so:

```
// This time, we are using the AttributeUsage attribute
// to annotate our custom attribute.
[AttributeUsage(AttributeTargets.Class | AttributeTargets.Struct,
     AllowMultiple = false, Inherited = false)]
public class VehicleDescriptionAttribute : System.Attribute
{
...
}
```

With this, if a developer attempted to apply the `[VehicleDescription]` attribute on anything other than a class or structure, he or she is issued a compile-time error.

■ **Tip** Always get in the habit of explicitly marking the usage flags for any custom attribute you may create, as not all .NET programming languages honor the use of unqualified attributes!

Assembly-Level (and Module-Level) Attributes

It is also possible to apply attributes on all types within a given module or all modules within a given assembly using the `[module:]` and `[assembly:]` tags, respectively. For example, assume you wish to ensure that every public type defined within your assembly is CLS-compliant. To do so, simply add the following line in any one of your C# source code files (do note that assembly-level attributes must be outside the scope of a namespace definition):

```
// Enforce CLS compliance for all public types in this assembly.
[assembly:System.CLSCompliantAttribute(true)]
```

If you now add a bit of code that falls outside the CLS specification (such as an exposed point of unsigned data)

```
// Ulong types don't jive with the CLS.
public class Winnebago
{
     public ulong notCompliant;
}
```

you are issued a compiler error.

The Visual Studio 2005 AssemblyInfo.cs File

By default, Visual Studio 2005 generates a file named `AssemblyInfo.cs` (see Figure 12-9).

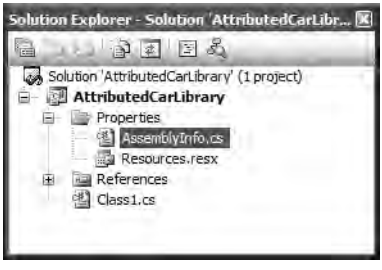


Figure 12-9. *The* `AssemblyInfo.cs` *file*

This file is a handy place to put attributes that are to be applied at the assembly level. Table 12-4 lists some assembly-level attributes to be aware of.

Table 12-4. *Select Assembly-Level Attributes*

Attribute	Meaning in Life
`AssemblyCompanyAttribute`	Holds basic company information
`AssemblyCopyrightAttribute`	Holds any copyright information for the product or assembly
`AssemblyCultureAttribute`	Provides information on what cultures or languages the assembly supports
`AssemblyDescriptionAttribute`	Holds a friendly description of the product or modules that make up the assembly

Continued

Table 12-4. *(Continued)*

Attribute	Meaning in Life
`AssemblyKeyFileAttribute`	Specifies the name of the file containing the key pair used to sign the assembly (i.e., establish a shared name)
`AssemblyOperatingSystemAttribute`	Provides information on which operating system the assembly was built to support
`AssemblyProcessorAttribute`	Provides information on which processors the assembly was built to support
`AssemblyProductAttribute`	Provides product information
`AssemblyTrademarkAttribute`	Provides trademark information
`AssemblyVersionAttribute`	Specifies the assembly's version information, in the format *<major.minor.build.revision>*

■ **Source Code** The AttributedCarLibrary project is included in the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Reflecting on Attributes Using Early Binding

As mentioned in this chapter, an attribute is quite useless until some piece of software reflects over its values. Once a given attribute has been discovered, that piece of software can take whatever course of action necessary. Now, like an application, this "other piece of software" could discover the presence of a custom attribute using either early binding or late binding. If you wish to make use of early binding, you'll require the client application to have a compile-time definition of the attribute in question (`VehicleDescriptionAttribute` in this case). Given that the AttributedCarLibrary assembly has defined this custom attribute as a public class, early binding is the best option.

To illustrate the process of reflecting on custom attributes, create a new C# console application named `VehicleDescriptionAttributeReader`. Next, set a reference to the AttributedCarLibrary assembly. Finally, update your initial `*.cs` file with the following code:

```
// Reflecting on custom attributes using early binding.
using System;
using AttributedCarLibrary;

public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          // Get a Type representing the Winnebago.
          Type t = typeof(Winnebago);

          // Get all attributes on the Winnebago.
          object[] customAtts = t.GetCustomAttributes(false);

          // Print the description.
          Console.WriteLine("***** Value of VehicleDescriptionAttribute *****\n");
          foreach(VehicleDescriptionAttribute v in customAtts)
               Console.WriteLine("-> {0}\n", v.Description);
          Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

As the name implies, `Type.GetCustomAttributes()` returns an object array that represents all the attributes applied to the member represented by the `Type` (the Boolean parameter controls whether the search should extend up the inheritance chain). Once you have obtained the list of attributes, iterate over each `VehicleDescriptionAttribute` class and print out the value obtained by the `Description` property.

■ **Source Code** The VehicleDescriptionAttributeReader application is included under the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Reflecting on Attributes Using Late Binding

The previous example made use of early binding to print out the vehicle description data for the `Winnebago` type. This was possible due to the fact that the `VehicleDescriptionAttribute` class type was defined as a public member in the AttributedCarLibrary assembly. It is also possible to make use of dynamic loading and late binding to reflect over attributes.

Create a new project called VehicleDescriptionAttributeReaderLateBinding and copy `AttributedCarLibrary.dll` to the project's `\Bin\Debug` directory. Now, update your `Main()` method as so:

```
using System.Reflection;

namespace VehicleDescriptionAttributeReaderLateBinding
{
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** Descriptions of Your Vehicles *****\n");

            // Load the local copy of AttributedCarLibrary.
            Assembly asm = Assembly.Load("AttributedCarLibrary");

            // Get type info of VehicleDescriptionAttribute.
            Type vehicleDesc =
                asm.GetType("AttributedCarLibrary.VehicleDescriptionAttribute");

            // Get type info of the Description property.
            PropertyInfo propDesc = vehicleDesc.GetProperty("Description");

            // Get all types in the assembly.
            Type[] types = asm.GetTypes();

            // Iterate over each type and obtain any VehicleDescriptionAttributes.
            foreach (Type t in types)
            {
                object[] objs = t.GetCustomAttributes(vehicleDesc, false);

                // Iterate over each VehicleDescriptionAttribute and print
                // the description using late binding.
                foreach (object o in objs)
                {
                    Console.WriteLine("-> {0}: {1}\n",
                        t.Name, propDesc.GetValue(o, null));
                }
            }
```

```
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

If you were able to follow along with the examples in this chapter, this `Main()` method should be (more or less) self-explanatory. The only point of interest is the use of the `PropertyInfo.GetValue()` method, which is used to trigger the property's accessor. Figure 12-10 shows the output.

■ **Source Code** The VehicleDescriptionAttributeReaderLateBinding application is included under the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

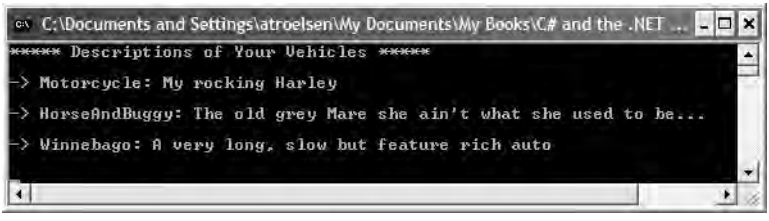

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET ...
***** Descriptions of Your Vehicles *****
-> Motorcycle: My rocking Harley
-> HorseAndBuggy: The old grey Mare she ain't what she used to be...
-> Winnebago: A very long, slow but feature rich auto

Figure 12-10. *Reflecting on attributes using late binding*

Putting Reflection, Late Binding, and Custom Attributes in Perspective

Even though you have seen numerous examples of these techniques in action, you may still be wondering when to make use of reflection, dynamic loading, late binding, and custom attributes in your programs. To be sure, these topics (while fascinating) can seem a bit on the academic side of programming (which may or may not be a bad thing, depending on your point of view). To help map these topics to a real-world situation, you need a solid example. Assume for the moment that you are on a programming team that is building an application with the following requirement:

- The product must be extendible by the use of additional third-party tools.

So, what exactly is meant by *extendable*? Consider Visual Studio 2005. When this application was developed, various "hooks" were inserted to allow other software vendors to snap custom modules into the IDE. Obviously, the Visual Studio 2005 team had no way to set references to external .NET assemblies it had not programmed (thus, no early binding), so how exactly would an application provide the required hooks?

- First, an extendable application must provide some input vehicle to allow the user to specify the module to plug in (such as a dialog box or command-line flag). This requires *dynamic loading*.
- Second, an extendable application must be able to determine if the module supports the correct functionality (such as a set of required interfaces) in order to be plugged into the environment. This requires *reflection*.
- Finally, an extendable application must obtain a reference to the required infrastructure (e.g., the interface types) and invoke the members to trigger the underlying functionality. This often requires *late binding*.

Simply put, if the extendible application has been preprogrammed to query for specific interfaces, it is able to determine at runtime if the type can be activated. Once this verification test has been passed, the type in question may support additional interfaces that provide a polymorphic fabric to their functionality. This is the exact approach taken by the Visual Studio 2005 team, and despite what you may be thinking, is not at all difficult.

Building an Extendable Application

In the sections that follow, I will take you through a complete example that illustrates the process of building an extendible Windows Forms application that can be augmented by the functionality of external assemblies. What I will not do at this point is comment on the process of programming Windows Forms applications (Chapters 19, 20, and 21 will tend to that chore). So, if you are not familiar with the process of building Windows Forms applications, feel free to simply open up the supplied sample code and follow along (or build a console-based alternative). To serve as a road map, our extendible application entails the following assemblies:

- `CommonSnappableTypes.dll`: This assembly contains type definitions that will be implemented by each snap-in as well as referenced by the extendible Windows Forms application.
- `CSharpSnapIn.dll`: A snap-in written in C#, which leverages the types of `CommonSnappableTypes.dll`.
- `VbNetSnapIn.dll`: A snap-in written in Visual Basic .NET, which leverages the types of `CommonSnappableTypes.dll`.
- `MyPluggableApp.exe`: This Windows Forms application will be the entity that may be extended by the functionality of each snap-in. Again, this application will make use of dynamic loading, reflection, and late binding to dynamically gain the functionality of assemblies it has no prior knowledge of.

Building CommonSnappableTypes.dll

The first order of business is to create an assembly that contains the types that a given snap-in must leverage to be plugged into your expandable Windows Forms application. The CommonSnappableTypes class library project defines two types:

```
namespace CommonSnappableTypes
{
     public interface IAppFunctionality
     {
          void DoIt();
     }

     [AttributeUsage(AttributeTargets.Class)]
     public sealed class CompanyInfoAttribute : System.Attribute
     {
          private string companyName;
          private string companyUrl;
          public CompanyInfoAttribute(){}

          public string Name
          {
            get { return companyName; }
            set { companyName = value; }
          }
```

```
            public string Url
            {
              get { return companyUrl; }
              set { companyUrl = value; }
            }
      }
}
```

The `IAppFunctionality` interface provides a polymorphic interface for all snap-ins that can be consumed by the extendible Windows Forms application. Of course, as this example is purely illustrative in nature, you supply a single method named `DoIt()`. To map this to a real-world example, imagine an interface (or a set of interfaces) that allows the snapper to generate scripting code, render an image onto the application's toolbox, or integrate into the main menu of the hosting application.

The `CompanyInfoAttribute` type is a custom attribute that will be applied on any class type that wishes to be snapped in to the container. As you can tell by the definition of this class, `[CompanyInfo]` allows the developer of the snap-in to provide some basic details about the component's point of origin.

Building the C# Snap-In

Next up, you need to create a type that implements the `IAppFunctionality` interface. Again, to focus on the overall design of an extendible application, a trivial type is in order. Assume a new C# code library named CSharpSnapIn that defines a class type named `CSharpModule`. Given that this class must make use of the types defined in CommonSnappableTypes, be sure to set a reference to this binary (as well as `System.Windows.Forms.dll` to display a noteworthy message). This being said, here is the code:

```
using System;
using CommonSnappableTypes;
using System.Windows.Forms;

namespace CSharpSnapIn
{
     [CompanyInfo(Name = "Intertech Training",
          Url = "www.intertechtraining.com")]
     public class TheCSharpModule : IAppFunctionality
     {
          void IAppFunctionality.DoIt()
          {
               MessageBox.Show("You have just used the C# snap in!");
          }
     }
}
```

Notice that I choose to make use of explicit interface implementation when supporting the `IAppFunctionality` interface. This is not required; however, the idea is that the only part of the system that needs to directly interact with this interface type is the hosting Windows application.

Building the Visual Basic .NET Snap-In

Now, to simulate the role of a third-party vendor who prefers Visual Basic .NET over C#, create a new Visual Basic .NET code library (VbNetSnapIn) that references the same external assemblies as the previous CSharpSnapIn project. The code is (again) intentionally simple:

```
Imports System.Windows.Forms
Imports CommonSnappableTypes
```

```
<CompanyInfo(Name:="Chucky's Software", Url:="www.ChuckySoft.com")> _
Public Class VbNetSnapIn
    Implements IAppFunctionality

    Public Sub DoIt() Implements CommonSnappableTypes.IAppFunctionality.DoIt
        MessageBox.Show("You have just used the VB .NET snap in!")
    End Sub
End Class
```

Not too much to say here! Do notice, however, that applying attributes in the syntax of Visual Basic .NET requires angle brackets (`< >`) rather than square brackets (`[ ]`).

Building an Extendable Windows Forms Application

The final step is to create a new Windows Forms application (MyExtendableApp) that allows the user to select a snap-in using a standard Windows Open dialog box. Next, set a reference to the `CommonSnappableTypes.dll` assembly, but *not* the `CSharpSnapIn.dll` or `VbNetSnapIn.dll` code libraries. Remember that the whole goal of this application is to make use of late binding and reflection to determine the "snapability" of independent binaries created by third-party vendors.

Again, I won't bother to examine all the details of Windows Forms development at this point in the text. However, assuming you have placed a `MenuStrip` component onto the Form template, define a topmost menu item named Tools that provides a single submenu named Snap In Module (see Figure 12-11).



Figure 12-11. *Initial GUI for MyExtendableApp*

This Windows Form will also contain a `ListBox` type (which I renamed as `lstLoadedSnapIns`) that will be used to display the names of each snap-in loaded by the user. Figure 12-12 shows the final GUI.

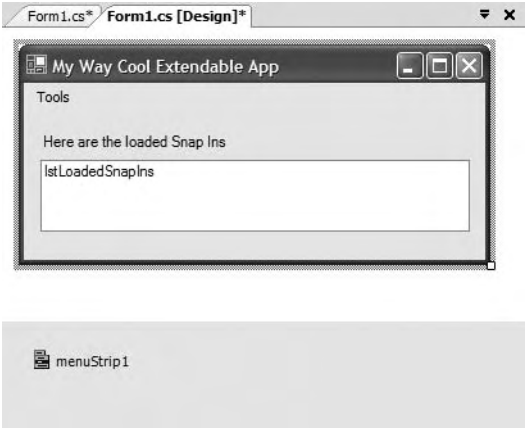


Figure 12-12. *Final GUI for MyExtendableApp*

The code that handles the Tools ➤ Snap In Module menu item (which may be created simply by double-clicking the menu item from the design-time editor) displays a File Open dialog box and extracts the path to the selected file. This path is then sent into a helper function named `LoadExternalModule()` for processing. This method will return `false` when it is unable to find a class implementing `IAppFunctionality`:

```
private void snapInModuleToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender,
  EventArgs e)
{
    // Allow user to select an assembly to load.
    OpenFileDialog dlg = new OpenFileDialog();

    if (dlg.ShowDialog() == DialogResult.OK)
    {
        if (LoadExternalModule(dlg.FileName) == false)
            MessageBox.Show("Nothing implements IAppFunctionality!");
    }
}
```

The `LoadExternalModule()` method performs the following tasks:

- Dynamically loads the assembly into memory
- Determines if the assembly contains a type implementing `IAppFunctionality`

If a type implementing `IAppFunctionality` is found, the `DoIt()` method is called, and the fully qualified name of the type is added to the `ListBox` (note that the `for` loop will iterate over all types in the assembly to account for the possibility that a single assembly has multiple snap-ins):

```
private bool LoadExternalModule(string path)
{
    bool foundSnapIn = false;
    IAppFunctionality itfAppFx;

    // Dynamically load the selected assembly.
    Assembly theSnapInAsm = Assembly.LoadFrom(path);

    // Get all types in assembly.
    Type[] theTypes = theSnapInAsm.GetTypes();
```

```
    // See if a type implement IAppFunctionality.
    for (int i = 0; i < theTypes.Length; i++)
    {
        Type t = theTypes[i].GetInterface("IAppFunctionality");
        if (t != null)
        {
            foundSnapIn = true;

            // Use late binding to create the type.
            object o =
                theSnapInAsm.CreateInstance(theTypes[i].FullName);

            // Call DoIt() off the interface.
            itfAppFx = o as IAppFunctionality;
            itfAppFx.DoIt();
            lstLoadedSnapIns.Items.Add(theTypes[i].FullName);
        }
    }
    return foundSnapIn;
}
```

At this point, you can run your application. When you select the `CSharpSnapIn.dll` or `VbNetSnapIn.dll` assemblies, you should see the correct message displayed. Figure 12-13 shows one possible run.

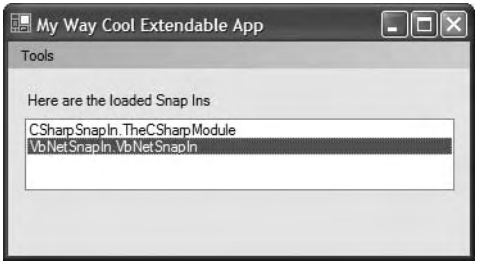


Figure 12-13. *Snapping in external assemblies*

The final task is to display the metadata provided by the `[CompanyInfo]`. To do so, simply update `LoadExternalModule()` to call a new helper function named `DisplayCompanyData()` before exiting the `if` scope. Notice this method takes a single `System.Type` parameter.

```
private bool LoadExternalModule(string path)
{
...
        if (t != null)
        {
...
            // Show company info.
            DisplayCompanyData(theTypes[i]);
        }
    }
    return foundSnapIn;
}
```

Using the incoming type, simply reflect over the [CompanyInfo] attribute:

```
private void DisplayCompanyData(Type t)
{
    // Get [CompanyInfo] data.
    object[] customAtts = t.GetCustomAttributes(false);

    // Show data.
    foreach (CompanyInfoAttribute c in customAtts)
    {
        MessageBox.Show(c.Url,
            string.Format("More info about {0} can be found at", c.Name));
    }
}
```

Excellent! That wraps up the example application. I hope at this point you can see that the topics presented in this chapter can be quite helpful in the real world and are not limited to the tool builders of the world.

■ **Source Code** The CommonSnappableTypes, CSharpSnapIn, VbNetSnapIn, and MyExtendableApp applications are included under the Chapter 12 subdirectory.

Summary

Reflection is a very interesting aspect of a robust OO environment. In the world of .NET, the keys to reflection services revolve around the System.Type class and the System.Reflection namespace. As you have seen, reflection is the process of placing a type under the magnifying glass at runtime to understand the who, what, where, when, why, and how of a given item.

Late binding is the process of creating a type and invoking its members without prior knowledge of the specific names of said members. As shown during this chapter's extendible application example, this is a very powerful technique used by tool builders as well as tool consumers. This chapter also examined the role of attribute-based programming. When you adorn your types with attributes, the result is the augmentation of the underlying assembly metadata.

CHAPTER 13

Processes, AppDomains, Contexts, and CLR Hosts

In the previous two chapters, you examined the steps taken by the CLR to resolve the location of an externally referenced assembly as well as the role of .NET metadata. In this chapter, you'll drill deeper into the details of how an assembly is hosted by the CLR and come to understand the relationship between processes, application domains, and object contexts.

In a nutshell, *application domains* (or, simply, *AppDomains*) are logical subdivisions within a given process that host a set of related .NET assemblies. As you will see, an AppDomain is further subdivided into contextual boundaries, which are used to group together like-minded .NET objects. Using the notion of context, the CLR is able to ensure that objects with special runtime requirements are handled appropriately.

Once you have come to understand how an assembly is hosted by the CLR, it's time to address the next obvious question: what is hosting the CLR? As you recall from Chapter 1, the CLR itself is represented (in part) by `mscoree.dll`. When you launch an executable assembly, `mscoree.dll` is loaded automatically; however, as you will see, there are actually a number of transparent steps happening in the background.

Reviewing Traditional Win32 Processes

The concept of a "process" has existed within Windows-based operating systems well before the release of the .NET platform. Simply put, *process* is the term used to describe the set of resources (such as external code libraries and the primary thread) and the necessary memory allocations used by a running application. For each `*.exe` loaded into memory, the OS creates a separate and isolated process for use during its lifetime. Using this approach to application isolation, the result is a much more robust and stable runtime environment, given that the failure of one process does not affect the functioning of another.

Now, every Win32 process is assigned a unique process identifier (PID) and may be independently loaded and unloaded by the OS as necessary (as well as programmatically using Win32 API calls). As you may be aware, the Processes tab of the Windows Task Manager utility (activated via the Ctrl+Shift+Esc keystroke combination) allows you to view various statistics regarding the processes running on a given machine, including its PID and image name (see Figure 13-1).

■ **Note** If you do not see a PID column listed in Task Manager, simply select View ➤ Select Columns and check the PID box.


Windows Task Manager
File Options View Shut Down Help
Applications Processes Performance Networking Users
Image Name PID User Name CPU Mem
notepad.exe 3808 Andrew Troelsen 00
iPodService.exe 3760 SYSTEM 00 3
WINWORD.EXE 3592 Andrew Troelsen 00 35
wdfmgr.exe 3292 LOCAL SERVICE 00 1
symlcsvc.exe 3248 SYSTEM 00
svchost.exe 3232 SYSTEM 00
slserv.exe 3196 SYSTEM 00
TEKS_Service.exe 3016 SYSTEM 00 1
nvsvc32.exe 2976 SYSTEM 00 2
NAVAPSVC.EXE 2944 SYSTEM 00 1
mysqld-nt.exe 2896 SYSTEM 00 13
sqlservr.exe 2628 SYSTEM 00 15
sqlservr.exe 2520 NETWORK SERVICE 00 10
CCPROXY.EXE 2016 SYSTEM 00 7
Weather.exe 1996 Andrew Troelsen 00 9
Steam.exe 1984 Andrew Troelsen 00 14
iTunesHelper.exe 1976 Andrew Troelsen 00 4
Show processes from all users
End Process
Processes: 51 CPU Usage: 1% Commit Charge: 466M / 3938M

Figure 13-1. *Windows Task Manager*

An Overview of Threads

Every Win32 process has exactly one main "thread" that functions as the entry point for the application. The next chapter examines how to create additional threads and thread-safe code using the `System.Threading` namespace; however, to facilitate the topics presented here, we need a few working definitions. First of all, a *thread* is a path of execution within a process. Formally speaking, the first thread created by a process's entry point is termed the *primary thread*. Win32 GUI desktop applications define the `WinMain()` method as the application's entry point. On the other hand, a console application provides the `Main()` method for the same purpose.

Processes that contain a single primary thread of execution are intrinsically *thread-safe*, given the fact that there is only one thread that can access the data in the application at a given time. However, a single-threaded process (especially one that is GUI-based) will often appear a bit unresponsive to the user if this single thread is performing a complex operation (such as printing out a lengthy text file, performing an exotic calculation, or attempting to connect to a remote server located thousands of miles away).

Given this potential drawback of single-threaded applications, the Win32 API makes it is possible for the primary thread to spawn additional secondary threads (also termed *worker threads*) using a handful of Win32 API functions such as `CreateThread()`. Each thread (primary or secondary) becomes a unique path of execution in the process and has concurrent access to all shared points of data.

As you may have guessed, developers typically create additional threads to help improve the program's overall responsiveness. Multithreaded processes provide the illusion that numerous activities are happening at more or less the same time. For example, an application may spawn

a worker thread to perform a labor-intensive unit of work (again, such as printing a large text file). As this secondary thread is churning away, the main thread is still responsive to user input, which gives the entire process the potential of delivering greater performance. However, this may not actually be the case: using too many threads in a single process can actually *degrade* performance, as the CPU must switch between the active threads in the process (which takes time).

In reality, it is always worth keeping in mind that multithreading is most commonly an illusion provided by the OS. Machines that host a single CPU do not have the ability to literally handle multiple threads at the same exact time. Rather, a single CPU will execute one thread for a unit of time (called a *time slice*) based on the thread's priority level. When a thread's time slice is up, the existing thread is suspended to allow another thread to perform its business. For a thread to remember what was happening before it was kicked out of the way, each thread is given the ability to write to Thread Local Storage (TLS) and is provided with a separate call stack, as illustrated in Figure 13-2.

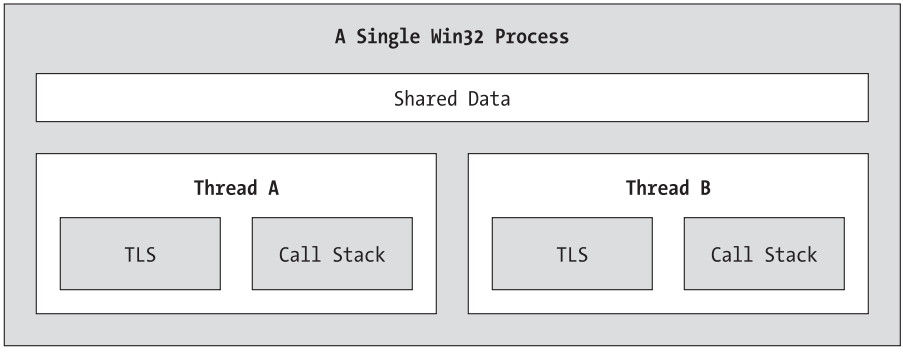


Figure 13-2. *The Win32 process/thread relationship*

If the subject of threads is new to you, don't sweat the details. At this point, just remember that a thread is a unique path of execution within a Win32 process. Every process has a primary thread (created via the executable's entry point) and may contain additional threads that have been programmatically created.

■ **Note** Newer Intel CPUs have a feature called *Hyper-Threading Technology* that allows a single CPU to handle multiple threads simultaneously under certain circumstances. See `http://www.intel.com/info/hyperthreading` for more details.

Interacting with Processes Under the .NET Platform

Although processes and threads are nothing new, the manner in which we interact with these primitives under the .NET platform has changed quite a bit (for the better). To pave the way to understanding the world of building multithreaded assemblies (see Chapter 14), let's begin by checking out how to interact with processes using the .NET base class libraries.

The `System.Diagnostics` namespace defines a number of types that allow you to programmatically interact with processes and various diagnostic-related types such as the system event log and performance counters. In this chapter, we are only concerned with the process-centric types defined in Table 13-1.

Table 13-1. *Select Members of the* `System.Diagnostics` *Namespace*

Process-Centric Types of the `System.Diagnostics` Namespace	Meaning in Life
`Process`	The `Process` class provides access to local and remote processes and also allows you to programmatically start and stop processes.
`ProcessModule`	This type represents a module (`*.dll` or `*.exe`) that is loaded into a particular process. Understand that the `ProcessModule` type can represent *any* module—COM-based, .NET-based, or traditional C-based binaries.
`ProcessModuleCollection`	Provides a strongly typed collection of `ProcessModule` objects.
`ProcessStartInfo`	Specifies a set of values used when starting a process via the `Process.Start()` method.
`ProcessThread`	Represents a thread within a given process. Be aware that `ProcessThread` is a type used to diagnose a process's thread set and is not used to spawn new threads of execution within a process.
`ProcessThreadCollection`	Provides a strongly typed collection of `ProcessThread` objects.

The `System.Diagnostics.Process` type allows you to analyze the processes running on a given machine (local or remote). The `Process` class also provides members that allow you to programmatically start and terminate processes, establish a process's priority level, and obtain a list of active threads and/or loaded modules within a given process. Table 13-2 lists some (but not all) of the key members of `System.Diagnostics.Process`.

Table 13-2. *Select Members of the* `Process` *Type*

Members	Meaning in Life
`ExitCode`	This property gets the value that the associated process specified when it terminated. Do note that you will be required to handle the `Exited` event (for asynchronous notification) or call the `WaitForExit()` method (for synchronous notification) to obtain this value.
`ExitTime`	This property gets the timestamp associated with the process that has terminated (represented with a `DateTime` type).
`Handle`	This property returns the handle associated to the process by the OS.
`HandleCount`	This property returns the number of handles opened by the process.
`Id`	This property gets the process ID (PID) for the associated process.
`MachineName`	This property gets the name of the computer the associated process is running on.
`MainModule`	This property gets the `ProcessModule` type that represents the main module for a given process.
`MainWindowTitle` `MainWindowHandle`	`MainWindowTitle` gets the caption of the main window of the process (if the process does not have a main window, you receive an empty string). `MainWindowHandle` gets the underlying handle (represented via a `System.IntPtr` type) of the associated window. If the process does not have a main window, the `IntPtr` type is assigned the value `System.IntPtr.Zero`.
`Modules`	This property provides access to the strongly typed `ProcessModuleCollection` type, which represents the set of modules (`*.dll` or `*.exe`) loaded within the current process.

Members	Meaning in Life
PriorityBoostEnabled	This property determines if the OS should temporarily boost the process if the main window has the focus.
PriorityClass	This property allows you to read or change the overall priority for the associated process.
ProcessName	This property gets the name of the process (which, as you would assume, is the name of the application itself).
Responding	This property gets a value indicating whether the user interface of the process is responding (or not).
StartTime	This property gets the time that the associated process was started (via a DateTime type).
Threads	This property gets the set of threads that are running in the associated process (represented via an array of ProcessThread types).
CloseMainWindow()	This method closes a process that has a user interface by sending a close message to its main window.
GetCurrentProcess()	This static method returns a new Process type that represents the currently active process.
GetProcesses()	This static method returns an array of new Process components running on a given machine.
Kill()	This method immediately stops the associated process.
Start()	This method starts a process.

Enumerating Running Processes

To illustrate the process of manipulating Process types (pardon the redundancy), assume you have a C# console application named ProcessManipulator, which defines the following static helper method:

```
public static void ListAllRunningProcesses()
{
     // Get all the processes on the local machine.
     Process[] runningProcs = Process.GetProcesses(".");

     // Print out PID and name of each process.
     foreach(Process p in runningProcs)
     {
          string info = string.Format("-> PID: {0}\tName: {1}",
               p.Id, p.ProcessName);
          Console.WriteLine(info);
     }
     Console.WriteLine("*********************************\n");
}
```

Notice how the static Process.GetProcesses() method returns an array of Process types that represent the running processes on the target machine (the dot notation shown here represents the local computer).

Once you have obtained the array of Process types, you are able to trigger any of the members seen in Table 13-2. Here, you are simply displaying the PID and the name of each process. Assuming the Main() method has been updated to call ListAllRunningProcesses(), you will see something like the output shown in Figure 13-3.

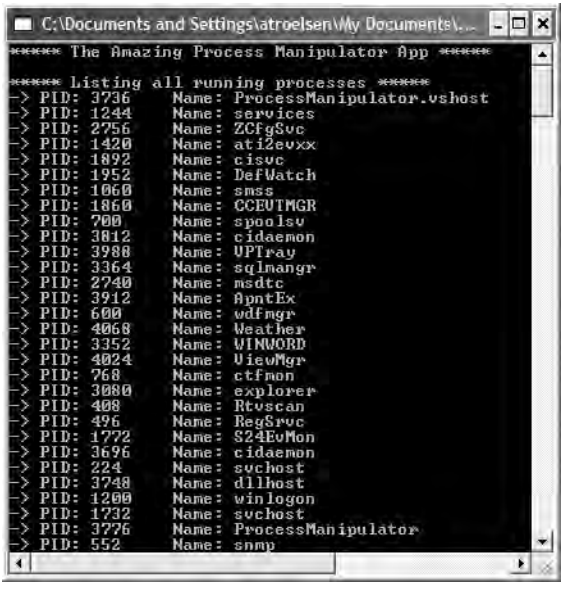

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\...
****** The Amazing Process Manipulator App ******
****** Listing all running processes ******
-> PID: 3736 Name: ProcessManipulator.vshost
-> PID: 1244 Name: services
-> PID: 2756 Name: ZCfgSvc
-> PID: 1420 Name: ati2evxx
-> PID: 1892 Name: cisvc
-> PID: 1952 Name: DefWatch
-> PID: 1060 Name: smss
-> PID: 1860 Name: CCEVTMGR
-> PID: 700 Name: spoolsv
-> PID: 3812 Name: cidaemon
-> PID: 3988 Name: VPTray
-> PID: 3364 Name: sqlmangr
-> PID: 2740 Name: msdtc
-> PID: 3912 Name: ApntEx
-> PID: 600 Name: wdfmgr
-> PID: 4068 Name: Weather
-> PID: 3352 Name: WINWORD
-> PID: 4024 Name: VievMgr
-> PID: 768 Name: ctfmon
-> PID: 3080 Name: explorer
-> PID: 408 Name: Rtvscan
-> PID: 496 Name: RegSrvc
-> PID: 1772 Name: S24EvMon
-> PID: 3696 Name: cidaemon
-> PID: 224 Name: svchost
-> PID: 3748 Name: dllhost
-> PID: 1200 Name: winlogon
-> PID: 1732 Name: svchost
-> PID: 3776 Name: ProcessManipulator
-> PID: 552 Name: snmp

Figure 13-3. *Enumerating running processes*

Investigating a Specific Process

In addition to obtaining a full and complete list of all running processes on a given machine, the static `Process.GetProcessById()` method allows you to obtain a single `Process` type via the associated PID. If you request access to a nonexistent process ID, an `ArgumentException` exception is thrown. Therefore, if you were interested in obtaining a `Process` object representing a process with the PID of 987, you could write the following:

```
// If there is no process with the PID of 987, a
// runtime exception will be thrown.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Process theProc;
     try
     {
          theProc = Process.GetProcessById(987);
     }
     catch  // Generic catch for used simplicity.
     {
          Console.WriteLine("-> Sorry...bad PID!");
     }
}
```

Investigating a Process's Thread Set

The `Process` class type also provides a manner to programmatically investigate the set of all threads currently used by a specific process. The set of threads is represented by the strongly typed `ProcessThreadCollection` collection, which contains some number of individual `ProcessThread` types. To illustrate, assume the following additional static helper function has been added to your current application:

```
public static void EnumThreadsForPid(int pID)
{
     Process theProc;
     try
     {
          theProc = Process.GetProcessById(pID);
     }
     catch
     {
          Console.WriteLine("-> Sorry...bad PID!");
          Console.WriteLine("************************************\n");
          return;
     }

     // List out stats for each thread in the specified process.
     Console.WriteLine("Here are the threads used by: {0}",
          theProc.ProcessName);
     ProcessThreadCollection theThreads = theProc.Threads;
     foreach(ProcessThread pt in theThreads)
     {
          string info =
              string.Format("-> Thread ID: {0}\tStart Time {1}\tPriority {2}",
               pt.Id , pt.StartTime.ToShortTimeString(), pt.PriorityLevel);
          Console.WriteLine(info);
     }
     Console.WriteLine("************************************\n");
}
```

As you can see, the `Threads` property of the `System.Diagnostics.Process` type provides access to the `ProcessThreadCollection` class. Here, you are printing out the assigned thread ID, start time, and priority level of each thread in the process specified by the client. Thus, if you update your program's `Main()` method to prompt the user for a PID to investigate, as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Prompt user for a PID and print out the set of active threads.
     Console.WriteLine("***** Enter PID of process to investigate *****");
     Console.Write("PID: ");
     string pID = Console.ReadLine();
     int theProcID = int.Parse(pID);

     EnumThreadsForPid(theProcID);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

you would find output along the lines of that shown in Figure 13-4.

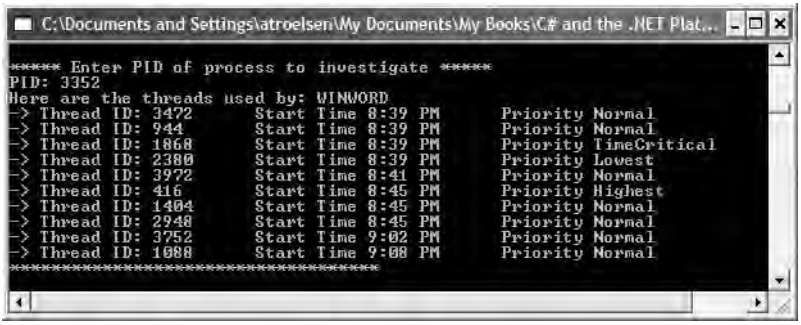

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Plat...
***** Enter PID of process to investigate *****
PID: 3352
Here are the threads used by: WINWORD
-> Thread ID: 3472 Start Time 8:39 PM Priority Normal
-> Thread ID: 944 Start Time 8:39 PM Priority Normal
-> Thread ID: 1868 Start Time 8:39 PM Priority TimeCritical
-> Thread ID: 2380 Start Time 8:39 PM Priority Lowest
-> Thread ID: 3972 Start Time 8:41 PM Priority Normal
-> Thread ID: 416 Start Time 8:45 PM Priority Highest
-> Thread ID: 1404 Start Time 8:45 PM Priority Normal
-> Thread ID: 2948 Start Time 8:45 PM Priority Normal
-> Thread ID: 3752 Start Time 9:02 PM Priority Normal
-> Thread ID: 1088 Start Time 9:08 PM Priority Normal
*****

Figure 13-4. *Enumerating the threads within a running process*

The `ProcessThread` type has additional members of interest beyond `Id`, `StartTime`, and `PriorityLevel`. Table 13-3 documents some members of interest.

Table 13-3. *Select Members of the* `ProcessThread` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`BasePriority`	Gets the base priority of the thread
`CurrentPriority`	Gets the current priority of the thread
`Id`	Gets the unique identifier of the thread
`IdealProcessor`	Sets the preferred processor for this thread to run on
`PriorityLevel`	Gets or sets the priority level of the thread
`ProcessorAffinity`	Sets the processors on which the associated thread can run
`StartAddress`	Gets the memory address of the function that the operating system called that started this thread
`StartTime`	Gets the time that the operating system started the thread
`ThreadState`	Gets the current state of this thread
`TotalProcessorTime`	Gets the total amount of time that this thread has spent using the processor
`WaitReason`	Gets the reason that the thread is waiting

Before you read any further, be very aware that the `ProcessThread` type is *not* the entity used to create, suspend, or kill threads under the .NET platform. Rather, `ProcessThread` is a vehicle used to obtain diagnostic information for the active Win32 threads within a running process. You will investigate how to build multithreaded applications using the `System.Threading` namespace in Chapter 14.

Investigating a Process's Module Set

Next up, let's check out how to iterate over the number of loaded modules that are hosted within a given process. Recall that a *module* is a generic name used to describe a given `*.dll` (or the `*.exe` itself) that is hosted by a specific process. When you access the `ProcessModuleCollection` via the `Process.Module` property, you are able to enumerate over *all modules* hosted within a process: .NET-based, COM-based, or traditional C-based libraries. Ponder the following additional helper function that will enumerate the modules in a specific process based on the PID:

```
public static void EnumModsForPid(int pID)
{
     Process theProc;
     try
     {
          theProc = Process.GetProcessById(pID);
     }
     catch
     {
          Console.WriteLine("-> Sorry...bad PID!");
          Console.WriteLine("************************************\n");
          return;
     }
     Console.WriteLine("Here are the loaded modules for: {0}",
          theProc.ProcessName);
     try
     {
          ProcessModuleCollection theMods = theProc.Modules;
          foreach(ProcessModule pm in theMods)
          {
               string info = string.Format("-> Mod Name: {0}", pm.ModuleName);
               Console.WriteLine(info);
          }
          Console.WriteLine("************************************\n");
     }
     catch
     {
          Console.WriteLine("No mods!");
     }
}
```

To see some possible output, let's check out the loaded modules for the process hosting the current console application (ProcessManipulator). To do so, run the application, identify the PID assigned to `ProcessManipulator.exe`, and pass this value to the `EnumModsForPid()` method (be sure to update your `Main()` method accordingly). Once you do, you may be surprised to see the list of `*.dll`s used for a simple console application (`atl.dll`, `mfc42u.dll`, `oleaut32.dll`, and so forth). Figure 13-5 shows a test run.

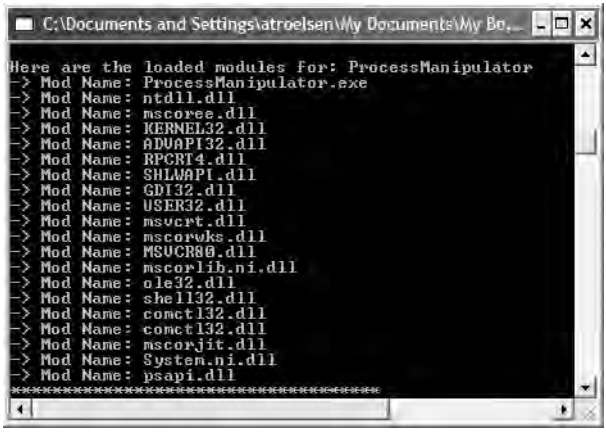

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Bo...
Here are the loaded modules for: ProcessManipulator
-> Mod Name: ProcessManipulator.exe
-> Mod Name: ntdll.dll
-> Mod Name: mscoree.dll
-> Mod Name: KERNEL32.dll
-> Mod Name: ADVAPI32.dll
-> Mod Name: RPCRT4.dll
-> Mod Name: SHLWAPI.dll
-> Mod Name: GDI32.dll
-> Mod Name: USER32.dll
-> Mod Name: msvcrt.dll
-> Mod Name: mscorwks.dll
-> Mod Name: MSVCR80.dll
-> Mod Name: mscorlib.ni.dll
-> Mod Name: ole32.dll
-> Mod Name: shell32.dll
-> Mod Name: comctl32.dll
-> Mod Name: comctl32.dll
-> Mod Name: mscorjit.dll
-> Mod Name: System.ni.dll
-> Mod Name: psapi.dll
****

Figure 13-5. *Enumerating the loaded modules within a running process*

Starting and Stopping Processes Programmatically

The final aspects of the `System.Diagnostics.Process` type examined here are the `Start()` and `Kill()` methods. As you can gather by their names, these members provide a way to programmatically launch and terminate a process, respectively. For example, ponder the static `StartAndKillProcess()` helper method:

```
public static void StartAndKillProcess()
{
     // Launch Internet Explorer.
     Process ieProc = Process.Start("IExplore.exe",
          "www.intertechtraining.com");

     Console.Write("--> Hit enter to kill {0}...", ieProc.ProcessName);
     Console.ReadLine();

     // Kill the iexplorer.exe process.
     try
     {
          ieProc.Kill();
     }
     catch{}   // In case the user already killed it...
}
```

The static `Process.Start()` method has been overloaded a few times, however. At minimum, you will need to specify the friendly name of the process you wish to launch (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer). This example makes use of a variation of the `Start()` method that allows you to specify any additional arguments to pass into the program's entry point (i.e., the `Main()` method).

The `Start()` method also allows you to pass in a `System.Diagnostics.ProcessStartInfo` type to specify additional bits of information regarding how a given process should come to life. Here is the formal definition of `ProcessStartInfo` (see the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details):

```
public sealed class System.Diagnostics.ProcessStartInfo :
    object
{
    public ProcessStartInfo();
    public ProcessStartInfo(string fileName);
    public ProcessStartInfo(string fileName, string arguments);
    public string Arguments { get; set; }
    public bool CreateNoWindow { get; set; }
    public StringDictionary EnvironmentVariables { get; }
    public bool ErrorDialog { get; set; }
    public IntPtr ErrorDialogParentHandle { get; set; }
    public string FileName { get; set; }
    public bool RedirectStandardError { get; set; }
    public bool RedirectStandardInput { get; set; }
    public bool RedirectStandardOutput { get; set; }
    public bool UseShellExecute { get; set; }
    public string Verb { get; set; }
    public string[] Verbs { get; }
    public ProcessWindowStyle WindowStyle { get; set; }
    public string WorkingDirectory { get; set; }
    public virtual bool Equals(object obj);
    public virtual int GetHashCode();
    public Type GetType();
    public virtual string ToString();
}
```

Regardless of which version of the `Process.Start()` method you invoke, do note that you are returned a reference to the newly activated process. When you wish to terminate the process, simply call the instance-level `Kill()` method.

■ **Source Code** The ProcessManipulator application is included under the Chapter 13 subdirectory.

Understanding .NET Application Domains

Now that you understand the role of Win32 processes and how to interact with them from managed code, we need to investigate the concept of a .NET application domain. Under the .NET platform, assemblies are not hosted directly within a process (as is the case in traditional Win32 applications). Rather, a .NET executable is hosted by a logical partition within a process termed an *application domain* (aka AppDomain). As you will see, a single process may contain multiple application domains, each of which is hosting a .NET executable. This additional subdivision of a traditional Win32 process offers several benefits, some of which are as follows:

- AppDomains are a key aspect of the OS-neutral nature of the .NET platform, given that this logical division abstracts away the differences in how an underlying OS represents a loaded executable.
- AppDomains are far less expensive in terms of processing power and memory than a full-blown process. Thus, the CLR is able to load and unload application domains much quicker than a formal process.
- AppDomains provide a deeper level of isolation for hosting a loaded application. If one AppDomain within a process fails, the remaining AppDomains remain functional.

As suggested in the previous hit list, a single process can host any number of AppDomains, each of which is fully and completely isolated from other AppDomains within this process (or any other process). Given this factoid, be very aware that an application running in one AppDomain is unable to obtain data of any kind (global variables or static fields) within another AppDomain unless they make use of the .NET remoting protocol (which you'll examine in Chapter 18).

While a single process *may* host multiple AppDomains, this is not always the case. At the very least, an OS process will host what is termed the *default application domain*. This specific application domain is automatically created by the CLR at the time the process launches.

After this point, the CLR creates additional application domains on an as-needed basis. If the need should arise (which it most likely *will not* for the majority of your .NET endeavors), you are also able to programmatically create application domains at runtime within a given process using static methods of the `System.AppDomain` class. This class is also useful for low-level control of application domains. Key members of this class are shown in Table 13-4.

Table 13-4. *Select Members of* `AppDomain`

Member	Meaning in Life
`CreateDomain()`	This static method creates a new AppDomain in the current process. Understand that the CLR will create new application domains as necessary, and thus the chance of you absolutely needing to call this member is slim to none.
`GetCurrentThreadId()`	This static method returns the ID of the active thread in the current application domain.

Continued

Table 13-4. (*Continued*)

Member	Meaning in Life
`Unload()`	This is another static method that allows you to unload a specified AppDomain within a given process.
`BaseDirectory`	This property returns the base directory used to probe for dependent assemblies.
`CreateInstance()`	This method creates an instance of a specified type defined in a specified assembly file.
`ExecuteAssembly()`	This method executes an assembly within an application domain, given its file name.
`GetAssemblies()`	This method gets the set of .NET assemblies that have been loaded into this application domain (COM-based or C-based binaries are ignored).
`Load()`	This method is used to dynamically load an assembly into the current application domain.

In addition, the `AppDomain` type also defines a small set of events that correspond to various aspects of an application domain's life cycle, as shown in Table 13-5.

Table 13-5. *Events of the* `AppDomain` *Type*

Event	Meaning in Life
`AssemblyLoad`	Occurs when an assembly is loaded
`AssemblyResolve`	Occurs when the resolution of an assembly fails
`DomainUnload`	Occurs when an AppDomain is about to be unloaded
`ProcessExit`	Occurs on the default application domain when the default application domain's parent process exits
`ResourceResolve`	Occurs when the resolution of a resource fails
`TypeResolve`	Occurs when the resolution of a type fails
`UnhandledException`	Occurs when an exception is not caught by an event handler

Enumerating a Process's AppDomains

To illustrate how to interact with .NET application domains programmatically, assume you have a new C# console application named AppDomainManipulator that defines a static method named `PrintAllAssembliesInAppDomain()`. This helper method makes use of `AppDomain.GetAssemblies()` to obtain a list of all .NET binaries hosted within the application domain in question.

This list is represented by an array of `System.Reflection.Assembly` types, and thus you are required to use the `System.Reflection` namespace (see Chapter 12). Once you acquire the assembly array, you iterate over the array and print out the friendly name and version of each module:

```
public static void PrintAllAssembliesInAppDomain(AppDomain ad)
{
     Assembly[] loadedAssemblies = ad.GetAssemblies();
     Console.WriteLine("***** Here are the assemblies loaded in {0} *****\n",
          ad.FriendlyName);
     foreach(Assembly a in loadedAssemblies)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("-> Name: {0}", a.GetName().Name);
          Console.WriteLine("-> Version: {0}\n", a.GetName().Version);
     }
```

Now let's update the `Main()` method to obtain a reference to the current application domain before invoking `PrintAllAssembliesInAppDomain()`, using the `AppDomain.CurrentDomain` property.

To make things a bit more interesting, notice that the `Main()` method launches a Windows Forms message box to force the CLR to load the `System.Windows.Forms.dll`, `System.Drawing.dll`, and `System.dll` assemblies (so be sure to set a reference to these assemblies and update your `using` statements appropriately):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** The Amazing AppDomain app *****\n");

     // Get info for current AppDomain.
     AppDomain defaultAD= AppDomain.CurrentDomain;
     MessageBox.Show("Hello");
     PrintAllAssembliesInAppDomain(defaultAD);

     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Figure 13-6 shows the output (your version numbers may differ).

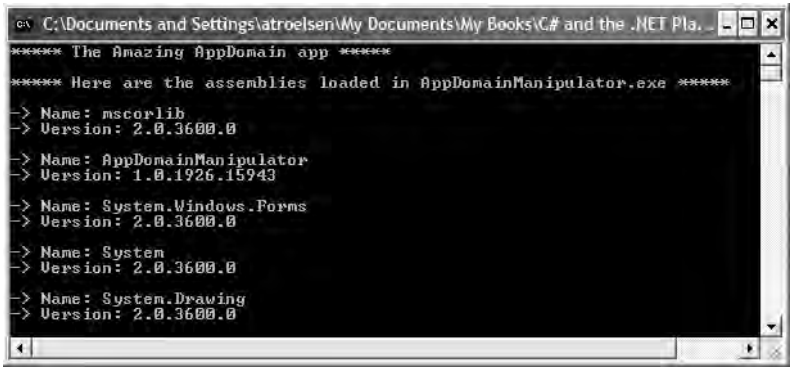

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Pla...
***** The Amazing AppDomain app *****
***** Here are the assemblies loaded in AppDomainManipulator.exe *****
-> Name: mscorlib
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
-> Name: AppDomainManipulator
-> Version: 1.0.1926.15943
-> Name: System.Windows.Forms
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
-> Name: System
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
-> Name: System.Drawing
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0

Figure 13-6. *Enumerating assemblies within the current application domain*

Programmatically Creating New AppDomains

Recall that a single process is capable of hosting multiple AppDomains. While it is true that you will seldom (if ever) need to manually create AppDomains in code, you are able to do so via the static `CreateDomain()` method. As you would guess, `AppDomain.CreateDomain()` has been overloaded a number of times. At minimum, you will specify the friendly name of the new application domain, as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Make a new AppDomain in the current process.
     AppDomain anotherAD = AppDomain.CreateDomain("SecondAppDomain");
     PrintAllAssembliesInAppDomain(anotherAD);

     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Now, if you run the application again (see Figure 13-7), notice that the `System.Windows.Forms.dll`, `System.Drawing.dll`, and `System.dll` assemblies are only loaded within the default application domain. This may seem counterintuitive if you have a background in traditional Win32 (as you might suspect, both application domains have access to the same assembly set). Recall, however, that an assembly loads into an *application domain*, not directly into the process itself.

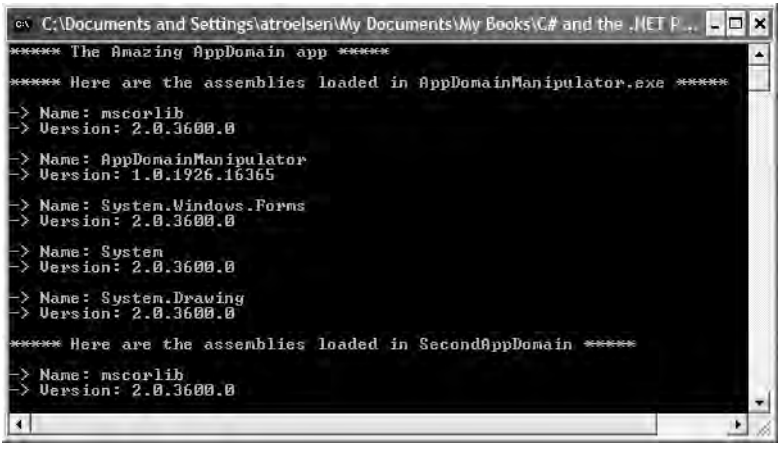

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET P...
***** The Amazing AppDomain app *****
***** Here are the assemblies loaded in AppDomainManipulator.exe *****
-> Name: mscorlib
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
-> Name: AppDomainManipulator
-> Version: 1.0.1926.16365
-> Name: System.Windows.Forms
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
-> Name: System
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
-> Name: System.Drawing
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0
***** Here are the assemblies loaded in SecondAppDomain *****
-> Name: mscorlib
-> Version: 2.0.3600.0

Figure 13-7. *A single process with two application domains*

Next, notice how the SecondAppDomain application domain automatically contains its own copy of `mscorlib.dll`, as this key assembly is automatically loaded by the CLR for each and every application domain. This begs the question, "How can I programmatically load an assembly into an application domain?" Answer: with the `AppDomain.Load()` method (or, alternatively, `AppDomain.ExecuteAssembly()`). Assuming you have copied `CarLibrary.dll` to the application directory of `AppDomainManipulator.exe`, you may load `CarLibrary.dll` into the SecondAppDomain AppDomain as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** The Amazing AppDomain app *****\n");
     ...
     // Load CarLibrary.dll into the new AppDomain.
    AppDomain anotherAD = AppDomain.CreateDomain("SecondAppDomain");
    anotherAD.Load("CarLibrary");
    PrintAllAssembliesInAppDomain(anotherAD);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

To solidify the relationship between processes, application domains, and assemblies, Figure 13-8 diagrams the internal composition of the `AppDomainManipulator.exe` process just constructed.

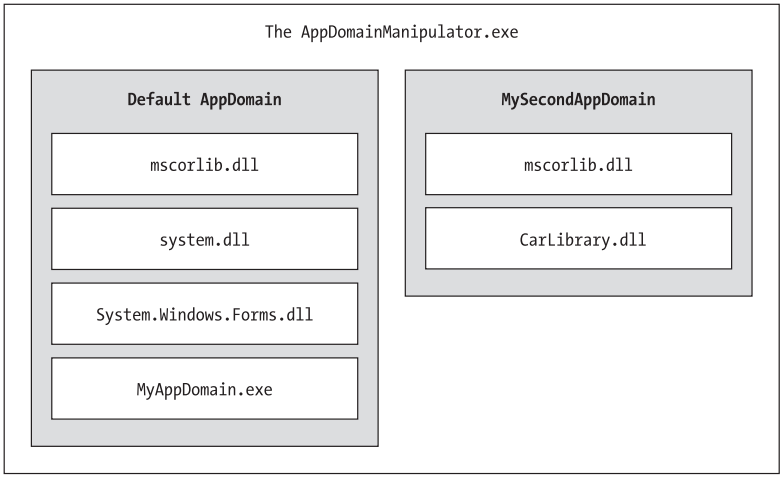


Figure 13-8. *The* `AppDomainManipulator.exe` *process under the hood*

Programmatically Unloading AppDomains

It is important to point out that the CLR does not permit unloading individual .NET assemblies. However, using the `AppDomain.Unload()` method, you are able to selectively unload a given application domain from its hosting process. When you do so, the application domain will unload each assembly in turn.

Recall that the `AppDomain` type defines a small set of events, one of which is `DomainUnload`. This event is fired when a (nondefault) AppDomain is unloaded from the containing process. Another event of interest is the `ProcessExit` event, which is fired when the default application domain is unloaded from the process (which obviously entails the termination of the process itself). Thus, if you wish to programmatically unload `anotherAD` from the `AppDomainManipulator.exe` process and be notified when the associated application domain is torn down, you are able to write the following event logic:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Hook into DomainUnload event.
     anotherAD.DomainUnload +=
          new EventHandler(anotherAD_DomainUnload);
     // Now unload anotherAD.
     AppDomain.Unload(anotherAD);
}
```

Notice that the `DomainUnload` event works in conjunction with the `System.EventHandler` delegate, and therefore the format of `anotherAD_DomainUnload()` takes the following arguments:

```
public static void anotherAD_DomainUnload(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Unloaded anotherAD! *****\n");
}
```

If you wish to be notified when the default AppDomain is unloaded, modify your `Main()` method to handle the `ProcessEvent` event of the default application domain:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     AppDomain defaultAD = AppDomain.CurrentDomain;
     defaultAD.ProcessExit +=new EventHandler(defaultAD_ProcessExit);
}
```

and define an appropriate event handler:

```
private static void defaultAD_ProcessExit(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Unloaded defaultAD! *****\n");
}
```

■ **Source Code** The AppDomainManipulator project is included under the Chapter 13 subdirectory.

Understanding Object Context Boundaries

As you have just seen, AppDomains are logical partitions within a process used to host .NET assemblies. On a related note, a given application domain may be further subdivided into numerous context boundaries. In a nutshell, a .NET context provides a way for a single AppDomain to establish a "specific home" for a given object.

Using context, the CLR is able to ensure that objects that have special runtime requirements are handled in an appropriate and consistent manner by intercepting method invocations into and out of a given context. This layer of interception allows the CLR to adjust the current method invocation to conform to the contextual settings of a given object. For example, if you define a C# class type that requires automatic thread safety (using the `[Synchronization]` attribute), the CLR will create a "synchronized context" during allocation.

Just as a process defines a default AppDomain, every application domain has a default context. This default context (sometimes referred to as *context 0*, given that it is always the first context created within an application domain) is used to group together .NET objects that have no specific or unique contextual needs. As you may expect, a vast majority of .NET objects are loaded into context 0. If the CLR determines a newly created object has special needs, a new context boundary is created within the hosting application domain. Figure 13-9 illustrates the process/AppDomain/context relationship.

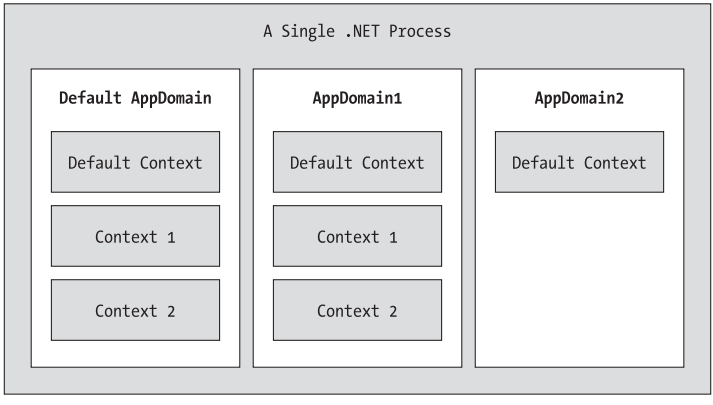


Figure 13-9. *Processes, application domains, and context boundaries*

Context-Agile and Context-Bound Types

.NET types that do not demand any special contextual treatment are termed *context-agile* objects. These objects can be accessed from anywhere within the hosting AppDomain without interfering with the object's runtime requirements. Building context-agile objects is a no-brainer, given that you simply do nothing (specifically, you do not adorn the type with any contextual attributes and do not derive from the `System.ContextBoundObject` base class):

```
// A context-agile object is loaded into context 0.
public class SportsCar{}
```

On the other hand, objects that do demand contextual allocation are termed *context-bound* objects, and they *must* derive from the `System.ContextBoundObject` base class. This base class solidifies the fact that the object in question can function appropriately only within the context in which it was created. Given the role of .NET context, it should stand to reason that if a context-bound object were to somehow end up in an incompatible context, bad things would be guaranteed to occur at the most inopportune times.

In addition to deriving from `System.ContextBoundObject`, a context-sensitive type will also be adorned by a special category of .NET attributes termed (not surprisingly) *context attributes*. All context attributes derive from the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts.ContextAttribute` base class:

```
public class System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts.ContextAttribute :
    Attribute, IContextAttribute, IContextProperty
{
    public ContextAttribute(string name);
    public string Name { virtual get; }
    public object TypeId { virtual get; }
    public virtual bool Equals(object o);
    public virtual void Freeze(System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts.Context newContext);
    public virtual int GetHashCode();
    public virtual void GetPropertiesForNewContext(
         System.Runtime.Remoting.Activation.IConstructionCallMessage ctorMsg);
    public Type GetType();
    public virtual bool IsContextOK(
      System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts.Context ctx,
      System.Runtime.Remoting.Activation.IConstructionCallMessage ctorMsg);
    public virtual bool IsDefaultAttribute();
    public virtual bool IsNewContextOK(
          System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts.Context newCtx);
    public virtual bool Match(object obj);
    public virtual string ToString();
}
```

Given that the `ContextAttribute` class is not sealed, it is possible for you to build your own custom contextual attribute (simply derive from `ContextAttribute` and override the necessary virtual methods). Once you have done so, you are able to build a custom piece of software that can respond to the contextual settings.

■ **Note** This book doesn't dive into the details of building custom object contexts; however, if you are interested in learning more, check out *Applied .NET Attributes* (Apress, 2003).

Defining a Context-Bound Object

Assume that you wish to define a class (SportsCarTS) that is automatically thread-safe in nature, even though you have not hard-coded thread synchronization logic within the member implementations. To do so, derive from ContextBoundObject and apply the [Synchronization] attribute as follows:

```
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts;

// This context-bound type will only be loaded into a
// synchronized (hence thread-safe) context.
[Synchronization]
public class SportsCarTS : ContextBoundObject
{}
```

Types that are attributed with the [Synchronization] attribute are loaded into a thread-safe context. Given the special contextual needs of the MyThreadSafeObject class type, imagine the problems that would occur if an allocated object were moved from a synchronized context into a nonsynchronized context. The object is suddenly no longer thread-safe and thus becomes a candidate for massive data corruption, as numerous threads are attempting to interact with the (now thread-volatile) reference object. To ensure the CLR does not move SportsCarTS objects outside of a synchronized context, simply derive from ContextBoundObject.

Inspecting an Object's Context

Although very few of the applications you will write will need to programmatically interact with context, here is an illustrative example. Create a new console application named ContextManipulator. This application defines one context-agile class (SportsCar) and a single context-bound type (SportsCarTS):

```
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts;  // For Context type.
using System.Threading;  // For Thread type.

// SportsCar has no special contextual
// needs and will be loaded into the
// default context of the app domain.
public class SportsCar
{
     public SportsCar()
     {
          // Get context information and print out context ID.
          Context ctx = Thread.CurrentContext;
          Console.WriteLine("{0} object in context {1}",
               this.ToString(), ctx.ContextID);
          foreach(IContextProperty itfCtxProp in ctx.ContextProperties)
               Console.WriteLine("-> Ctx Prop: {0}", itfCtxProp.Name);
     }
}

// SportsCarTS demands to be loaded in
// a synchronization context.
[Synchronization]
public class SportsCarTS : ContextBoundObject
{
     public SportsCarTS()
     {
```

```
        // Get context information and print out context ID.
        Context ctx = Thread.CurrentContext;
        Console.WriteLine("{0} object in context {1}",
             this.ToString(), ctx.ContextID);
        foreach(IContextProperty itfCtxProp in ctx.ContextProperties)
             Console.WriteLine("-> Ctx Prop: {0}", itfCtxProp.Name);
    }
}
```

Notice that each constructor obtains a `Context` type from the current thread of execution, via the static `Thread.CurrentContext` property. Using the `Context` object, you are able to print out statistics about the contextual boundary, such as its assigned ID, as well as a set of descriptors obtained via `Context.ContextProperties`. This property returns an object implementing the `IContextProperty` interface, which exposes each descriptor through the `Name` property. Now, update `Main()` to allocate an instance of each class type:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** The Amazing Context Application *****\n");

    // Objects will display contextual info upon creation.
    SportsCar sport = new SportsCar();
    Console.WriteLine();

    SportsCar sport2 = new SportsCar();
    Console.WriteLine();

    SportsCarTS synchroSport = new SportsCarTS();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

As the objects come to life, the class constructors will dump out various bits of context-centric information (see Figure 13-10).

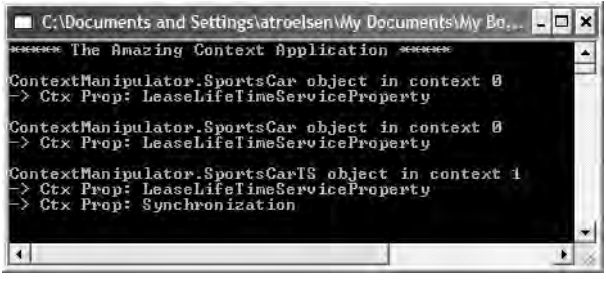

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Bo...
***** The Amazing Context Application *****
ContextManipulator.SportsCar object in context 0
-> Ctx Prop: LeaseLifeTimeServiceProperty
ContextManipulator.SportsCar object in context 0
-> Ctx Prop: LeaseLifeTimeServiceProperty
ContextManipulator.SportsCarTS object in context 1
-> Ctx Prop: LeaseLifeTimeServiceProperty
-> Ctx Prop: Synchronization

Figure 13-10. *Investigating an object's context*

Given that the SportsCar class has not been qualified with a context attribute, the CLR has allocated sport and sport2 into context 0 (i.e., the default context). However, the SportsCarTS object is loaded into a unique contextual boundary (which has been assigned a context ID of 1), given the fact that this context-bound type was adorned with the [Synchronization] attribute.

■ **Source Code** The ContextManipulator project is included under the Chapter 13 subdirectory

---

Summarizing Processes, AppDomains, and Context

At this point, you hopefully have a much better idea about how a .NET assembly is hosted by the CLR. To summarize the key points,

- A .NET process hosts one to many application domains. Each AppDomain is able to host any number of related .NET assemblies and may be independently loaded and unloaded by the CLR (or programmatically via the System.AppDomain type).
- A given AppDomain consists of one to many contexts. Using a context, the CLR is able to place a "special needs" object into a logical container, to ensure that its runtime requirements are honored.

If the previous pages have seemed to be a bit too low level for your liking, fear not. For the most part, the .NET runtime automatically deals with the details of processes, application domains, and contexts on your behalf. The good news, however, is that this information provides a solid foundation for understanding multithreaded programming under the .NET platform. Before we turn our attention to the System.Threading namespace, though, we'll examine how the CLR itself is hosted by the Win32 OS.

Hosting the Common Language Runtime

To the end user, running a .NET executable is achieved simply by double-clicking the *.exe in Windows Explorer (or activating an associated shortcut). As you recall from Chapter 1, however, the .NET Framework is not (currently) incorporated directly into the Windows OS, but sits on top of the OS itself. When you install Visual Studio 2005 (or the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK) on your development machine, the .NET runtime environment (including the necessary base class libraries) is installed as well. Also recall that Microsoft provides a freely distributable .NET runtime setup program (dotnetfx.exe) to configure end user machines to host .NET assemblies.

Given that the Windows OS does not natively understand the format of a .NET assembly, it should be clear that various steps occur in the background when an executable assembly is activated. Under the Windows XP OS, the basic steps are as follows (do recall from Chapter 11 that all .NET assemblies contain Win32 header information):

1. The Windows OS loads the executable binary file into memory.
2. The Windows OS reads the embedded WinNT header to determine if the binary file is a .NET assembly (via the IMAGE_DIRECTORY_ENTRY_COM_DESCRIPTOR flag).
3. If the image is a .NET assembly, mscoree.dll is loaded.
4. mscoree.dll then loads *one of two* implementations of the CLR (mscorwks.dll or mscorsvr.dll).
5. At this point, the CLR takes over the show, performing all .NET-centric details (finding external assemblies, performing security checks, processing CIL code, performing garbage collections, etc.).

As suggested by the previous list, `mscoree.dll` is *not* the CLR itself (as I have suggested in previous chapters). Although it is safe to regard `mscoree.dll` as the actual CLR, in reality this binary file is a shim to one of two possible CLR implementations. If the host machine makes use of a single CPU, `mscorwks.dll` is loaded. If the machine supports multiple CPUs, `mscorsvr.dll` is loaded into memory (which is a version of the CLR optimized to execute on multiple-processor machines).

Side-by-Side Execution of the CLR

To dig just a bit deeper, realize that the .NET platform supports side-by-side execution, meaning that multiple versions of the .NET platform can be installed on a single machine (1.0, 1.1, and 2.0 at the time of this writing). `mscoree.dll` itself resides in the machine's System32 subdirectory of the registered Windows installation directory. On my machine, `mscoree.dll` lives under C:\WINDOWS\system32 (see Figure 13-11).

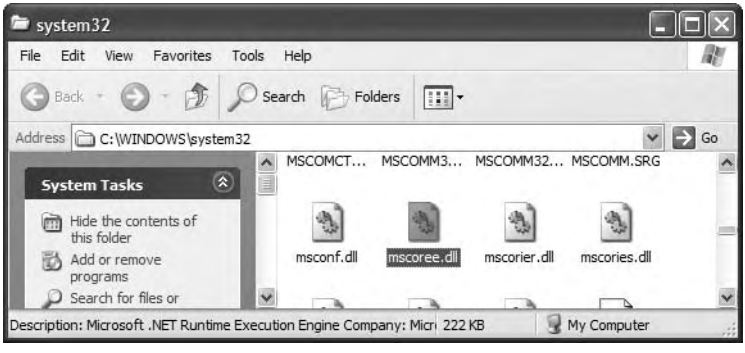


Figure 13-11. `mscoree.dll` *lives under the System32 directory*

Once `mscoree.dll` has been loaded, the Win32 system registry (yes, *that* system registry) is consulted to determine the latest installed version and installation path of the .NET Framework via HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\.NETFramework (see Figure 13-12).

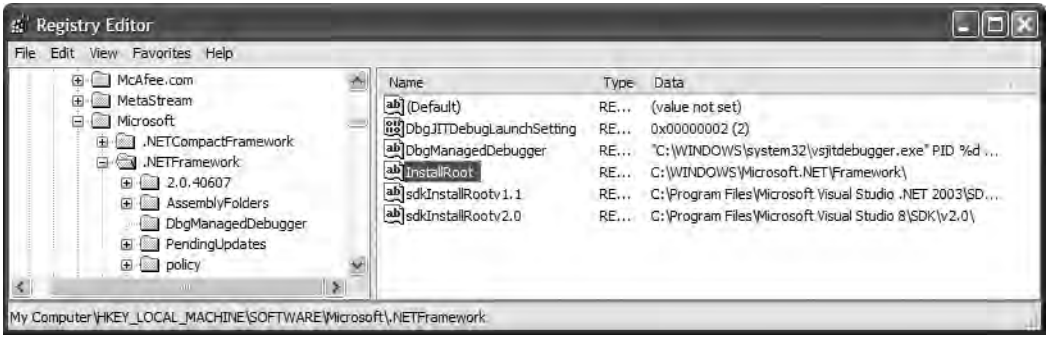


Figure 13-12. *Resolving the version and installation path of the .NET platform*

Once the version and installation path of the .NET platform have been determined, the correct version of `mscorwks.dll`/`mscorsvr.dll` is loaded into memory. Again, on my machine, the root installation path of the .NET platform is C:\WINDOWS\Microsoft.NET\Framework. Under this directory are specific subdirectories for .NET version 1.0, 1.1, and (at the time of this writing) the current build of 2.0 (see Figure 13-13; your version numbers may differ).

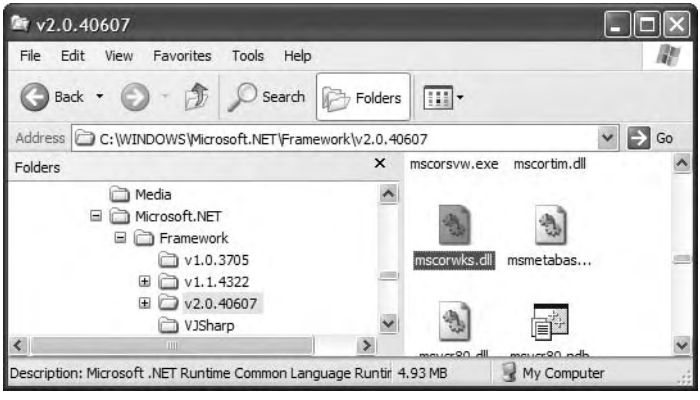


Figure 13-13. `mscorwks.dll` *version 2.0*

Loading a Specific Version of the CLR

When `mscoree.dll` determines which version of `mscorwks.dll`/`mscorsrv.dll` to load (by consulting the system registry), it will also read a subfolder under HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\.NET\Framework named "policy." This subfolder records the CLR upgrades that may be safely performed. For example, if you execute an assembly that was built using .NET version 1.0.3705, `mscoree.dll` learns from the policy file that it can safely load version 1.1.4322.

This promotion occurs silently in the background and only when the upgrade is known to produce compatible execution. In the rare case that you wish to instruct `mscoree.dll` to load a *specific* version of the CLR, you may do so using a client-side `*.config` file:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?>
<configuration>
    <startup>
        <requiredRuntime version ="1.0.3705"/>
    </startup>
</configuration>
```

Here, the `<requiredRuntime>` element expresses that only version 1.0.3705 should be used to host the assembly in question. Therefore, if the target machine does not have a complete installation of .NET version 1.0.3705, the end user is presented with the runtime error shown in Figure 13-14.

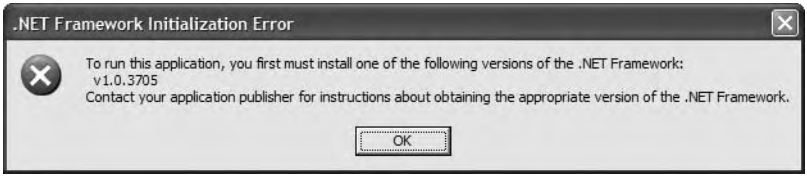

.NET Framework Initialization Error
To run this application, you first must install one of the following versions of the .NET Framework:
v1.0.3705
Contact your application publisher for instructions about obtaining the appropriate version of the .NET Framework.
OK

Figure 13-14. `<requiredRuntime>` *results in a runtime error if the specified version of the CLR is not*

Additional CLR Hosts

The process just defined qualifies the basic steps taken by the Windows OS to host the CLR when an executable assembly is activated. However, Microsoft provides many applications that bypass this out-of-the-box behavior in favor of loading the CLR *programmatically*. For example, Microsoft Internet Explorer can natively host custom Windows Forms controls (the managed equivalent of the now legacy ActiveX controls). The latest version of Microsoft SQL Server (code-named Yukon and officially called SQL Server 2005) also has the ability to directly host the CLR internally.

As a final note, Microsoft has defined a set of interfaces that allow developers to build their own custom CLR host. This may be done using straight C/C++ code or via a COM type library (`mscoree.tlb`). While the process of building a custom CLR host is surprisingly simple (especially using the COM type library), this topic is outside the scope of this text. If you require further information, you can find numerous articles online (just do a search for "CLR hosts").

Summary

The point of this chapter was to examine exactly how a .NET executable image is hosted by the .NET platform. As you have seen, the long-standing notion of a Win32 process has been altered under the hood to accommodate the needs of the CLR. A single process (which can be programmatically manipulated via the `System.Diagnostics.Process` type) is now composed of multiple application domains, which represent isolated and independent boundaries within a process. As you have seen, a single process can host multiple application domains, each of which is capable of hosting and executing any number of related assemblies.

Furthermore, a single application domain can contain any number of contextual boundaries. Using this additional level of type isolation, the CLR can ensure that special-need objects are handled correctly. The chapter concluded by examining the details regarding how the CLR is hosted by the Win32 OS.

CHAPTER 14

Building Multithreaded Applications

In the previous chapter, you examined the relationship between processes, application domains, and contexts. This chapter builds on your newfound knowledge by examining how the .NET platform allows you to build multithreaded applications and how to keep shared resources thread-safe.

You'll begin by revisiting the .NET delegate type and come to understand its intrinsic support for asynchronous method invocations. As you'll see, this technique allows you to invoke a method on a secondary thread of execution automatically. Next, you'll investigate the types within the `System.Threading` namespace. Here you'll examine numerous types (`Thread`, `ThreadStart`, etc.) that allow you to easily create additional threads of execution. Of course, the complexity of multithreaded development isn't in the creation of threads, but in ensuring that your code base is well equipped to handle concurrent access to shared resources. Given this, the chapter closes by examining various synchronization primitives that the .NET Framework provides.

The Process/AppDomain/Context/Thread Relationship

In the previous chapter, a *thread* was defined as a path of execution within an executable application. While many .NET applications can live happy and productive single-threaded lives, an assembly's primary thread (spawned by the CLR when `Main()` executes) may create secondary threads of execution to perform additional units of work. By implementing additional threads, you can build more responsive (but not necessarily faster executing) applications.

The `System.Threading` namespace contains various types that allow you to create multithreaded applications. The `Thread` class is perhaps the core type, as it represents a given thread. If you wish to programmatically obtain a reference to the thread currently executing a given member, simply call the static `Thread.CurrentThread` property:

```
private static void ExtractExecutingThread()
{
     // Get the thread currently
     // executing this method.
     Thread currThread = Thread.CurrentThread;
}
```

Under the .NET platform, there is *not* a direct one-to-one correspondence between application domains and threads. In fact, a given AppDomain can have numerous threads executing within it at any given time. Furthermore, a particular thread is not confined to a single application domain during its lifetime. Threads are free to cross application domain boundaries as the Win32 thread scheduler and CLR see fit.

Although active threads can be moved between AppDomain boundaries, a given thread can execute within only a single application domain at any point in time (in other words, it is impossible for a single thread to be doing work in more than one AppDomain). When you wish to programmatically gain access to the AppDomain that is hosting the current thread, call the static `Thread.GetDomain()` method:

```
private static void ExtractAppDomainHostingThread()
{
     // Obtain the AppDomain hosting the current thread.
     AppDomain ad = Thread.GetDomain();
}
```

A single thread may also be moved into a particular context at any given time, and it may be relocated within a new context at the whim of the CLR. When you wish to obtain the current context a thread happens to be executing in, make use of the static `Thread.CurrentContext` property:

```
private static void ExtractCurrentThreadContext()
{
     // Obtain the Context under which the
     // current thread is operating.
     Context ctx = Thread.CurrentContext;
}
```

Again, the CLR is the entity that is in charge of moving threads into (and out of) application domains and contexts. As a .NET developer, you can usually remain blissfully unaware where a given thread ends up (or exactly when it is placed into its new boundary). Nevertheless, you should be aware of the various ways of obtaining the underlying primitives.

The Problem of Concurrency and the Role of Thread Synchronization

One of the many "joys" (read: painful aspects) of multithreaded programming is that you have little control over how the underlying operating system or the CLR makes use of its threads. For example, if you craft a block of code that creates a new thread of execution, you cannot guarantee that the thread executes immediately. Rather, such code only instructs the OS to execute the thread as soon as possible (which is typically when the thread scheduler gets around to it).

Furthermore, given that threads can be moved between application and contextual boundaries as required by the CLR, you must be mindful of which aspects of your application are *thread-volatile* (e.g., subject to multithreaded access) and which operations are *atomic* (thread-volatile operations are the dangerous ones!). To illustrate, assume a thread is invoking a method of a specific object. Now assume that this thread is instructed by the thread scheduler to suspend its activity, in order to allow another thread to access the same method of the same object.

If the original thread was not completely finished with the current operation, the second incoming thread may be viewing an object in a partially modified state. At this point, the second thread is basically reading bogus data, which is sure to give way to extremely odd (and very hard to find) bugs, which are even harder to replicate and debug.

Atomic operations, on the other hand, are always safe in a multithreaded environment. Sadly, there are very few operations in the .NET base class libraries that are guaranteed to be atomic. Even the act of assigning a value to a member variable is not atomic! Unless the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation specifically says an operation is atomic, you must assume it is thread-volatile and take precautions.

At this point, it should be clear that multithreaded application domains are in themselves quite volatile, as numerous threads can operate on the shared functionality at (more or less) the same time. To protect an application's resources from possible corruption, .NET developers must make use of

any number of threading primitives (such as locks, monitors, and the [Synchronization] attribute) to control access among the executing threads.

Although the .NET platform cannot make the difficulties of building robust multithreaded applications completely disappear, the process has been simplified considerably. Using types defined within the System.Threading namespace, you are able to spawn additional threads with minimal fuss and bother. Likewise, when it is time to lock down shared points of data, you will find additional types that provide the same functionality as the Win32 API threading primitives (using a much cleaner object model).

However, the System.Threading namespace is not the only way to build multithread .NET programs. During our examination of the .NET delegate (see Chapter 8), it was mentioned that all delegates have the ability to invoke members asynchronously. This is a *major* benefit of the .NET platform, given that one of the most common reasons a developer creates threads is for the purpose of invoking methods in a nonblocking (aka asynchronous) manner. Although you could make use of the System.Threading namespace to achieve a similar result, delegates make the whole process much easier.

A Brief Review of the .NET Delegate

Recall that the .NET delegate type is a type-safe object-oriented function pointer. When you declare a .NET delegate, the C# compiler responds by building a sealed class that derives from System.MulticastDelegate (which in turn derives from System.Delegate). These base classes provide every delegate with the ability to maintain a list of method addresses, all of which may be invoked at a later time. Consider the BinaryOp delegate first defined in Chapter 8:

```
// A C# delegate type.
public delegate int BinaryOp(int x, int y);
```

Based on its definition, BinaryOp can point to any method taking two integers as arguments and returning an integer. Once compiled, the defining assembly now contains a full-blown class definition that is dynamically generated based on the delegate declaration. In the case of BinaryOp, this class looks more or less like the following (shown in pseudo-code):

```
sealed class BinaryOp : System.MulticastDelegate
{
     public BinaryOp(object target, uint functionAddress);
     public void Invoke(int x, int y);
     public IAsyncResult BeginInvoke(int x, int y,
          AsyncCallback cb, object state);
     public int EndInvoke(IAsyncResult result);
}
```

Recall that the generated Invoke() method is used to invoke the methods maintained by a delegate object in a synchronous manner. Therefore, the calling thread (such as the primary thread of the application) is forced to wait until the delegate invocation completes. Also recall that in C#, the Invoke() method is not directly called in code, but is triggered under the hood when applying "normal" method invocation syntax. Consider the following program, which invokes the static Add() method in a synchronous (aka blocking) manner:

```
// Need this for the Thread.Sleep() call.
using System.Threading;
using System;

namespace SyncDelegate
{
    public delegate int BinaryOp(int x, int y);
```

```
    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** Synch Delegate Review *****");

            // Print out the ID of the executing thread.
            Console.WriteLine("Main() invoked on thread {0}.",
                Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

            // Invoke Add() in a synchronous manner.
            BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(Add);
            int answer = b(10, 10);

            // These lines will not execute until
            // the Add() method has completed.
            Console.WriteLine("Doing more work in Main()!");
            Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 is {0}.", answer);
            Console.ReadLine();
        }

        static int Add(int x, int y)
        {
            // Print out the ID of the executing thread.
            Console.WriteLine("Add() invoked on thread {0}.",
                Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

            // Pause to simulate a lengthy operation.
            Thread.Sleep(5000);
            return x + y;
        }
    }
}
```

Notice first of all that this program is making use of the `System.Threading` namespace. Within the `Add()` method, you are invoking the static `Thread.Sleep()` method to suspend the calling thread for (more or less) five seconds to simulate a lengthy task. Given that you are invoking the `Add()` method in a *synchronous* manner, the `Main()` method will not print out the result of the operation until the `Add()` method has completed.

Next, note that the `Main()` method is obtaining access to the current thread (via `Thread.CurrentThread`) and printing out its hash code. Given that a hash code represents an object in a specific state, this value can be used to as a quick-and-dirty thread ID. This same logic is repeated in the static `Add()` method. As you might suspect, given that all the work in this application is performed exclusively by the primary thread, you find the same hash code value displayed to the console (see Figure 14-1).


C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Docume...
***** Synch Delegate Review *****
Main() invoked on thread 1.
Add() invoked on thread 1.
Doing more work in Main()!
10 + 10 is 20.

Figure 14-1. *Synchronous method invocations are "blocking" calls.*

When you run this program, you should notice that a five-second delay takes place before you see the `Console.WriteLine()` logic execute. Although many (if not most) methods may be called synchronously without ill effect, .NET delegates can be instructed to call their methods asynchronously if necessary.

■ **Source Code** The SyncDelegate project is located under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

The Asynchronous Nature of Delegates

If you are new to the topic of multithreading, you may wonder what exactly an *asynchronous* method invocation is all about. As you are no doubt fully aware, some programming operations take time. Although the previous `Add()` was purely illustrative in nature, imagine that you built a single-threaded application that is invoking a method on a remote object, performing a long-running database query, or writing 500 lines of text to an external file. While performing these operations, the application will appear to hang for quite some time. Until the task at hand has been processed, all other aspects of this program (such as menu activation, toolbar clicking, or console output) are unresponsive.

The question therefore is, how can you tell a delegate to invoke a method on a separate thread of execution to simulate numerous tasks performing "at the same time"? The good news is that every .NET delegate type is automatically equipped with this capability. The even better news is that you are *not* required to directly dive into the details of the `System.Threading` namespace to do so (although these entities can quite naturally work hand in hand).

The BeginInvoke() and EndInvoke() Methods

When the C# compiler processes the `delegate` keyword, the dynamically generated class defines two methods named `BeginInvoke()` and `EndInvoke()`. Given our definition of the `BinaryOp` delegate, these methods are prototyped as so:

```
sealed class BinaryOp : System.MulticastDelegate
{
...
     // Used to invoke a method asynchronously.
     public IAsyncResult BeginInvoke(int x, int y,
          AsyncCallback cb, object state);

     // Used to fetch the return value
     // of the invoked method.
     public int EndInvoke(IAsyncResult result);
}
```

The first stack of parameters passed into `BeginInvoke()` will be based on the format of the C# delegate (two integers in the case of `BinaryOp`). The final two arguments will always be `System.AsyncCallback` and `System.Object`. We'll examine the role of these parameters shortly; for the time being, though, we'll supply `null` for each.

The System.IAsyncResult Interface

Also note that the `BeginInvoke()` method always returns an object implementing the `IAsyncResult` interface, while `EndInvoke()` requires an `IAsyncResult`-compatible type as its sole parameter. The `IAsyncResult`-compatible object returned from `BeginInvoke()` is basically a coupling mechanism that allows the calling thread to obtain the result of the asynchronous method invocation at a later time via `EndInvoke()`. The `IAsyncResult` interface (defined in the `System` namespace) is defined as follows:

```
public interface IAsyncResult
{
    object AsyncState { get; }
    WaitHandle AsyncWaitHandle { get; }
    bool CompletedSynchronously { get; }
    bool IsCompleted { get; }
}
```

In the simplest case, you are able to avoid directly invoking these members. All you have to do is cache the `IAsyncResult`-compatible object returned by `BeginInvoke()` and pass it to `EndInvoke()` when you are ready to obtain the result of the method invocation. As you will see, you are able to invoke the members of an `IAsyncResult`-compatible object when you wish to become "more involved" with the process of fetching the method's return value.

■ **Note** If you asynchronously invoke a method that does not provide a return value, you can simply "fire and forget." In such cases, you will never need to cache the `IAsyncResult`-compatible object or call `EndInvoke()` in the first place (as there is no return value to retrieve).

Invoking a Method Asynchronously

To instruct the `BinaryOp` delegate to invoke `Add()` asynchronously, you can update the previous `Main()` method as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Async Delegate Invocation *****");

    // Print out the ID of the executing thread.
    Console.WriteLine("Main() invoked on thread {0}.",
        Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

    // Invoke Add() on a secondary thread.
    BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(Add);
    IAsyncResult iftAR = b.BeginInvoke(10, 10, null, null);

    // Do other work on primary thread...
    Console.WriteLine("Doing more work in Main()!");

    // Obtain the result of the Add()
    // method when ready.
    int answer = b.EndInvoke(iftAR);
    Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 is {0}.", answer);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

If you run this application, you will find that two unique hash codes are displayed, given that there are in fact two threads working within the current AppDomain (see Figure 14-2).

In addition to the unique hash code values, you will also notice upon running the application that the `Doing more work in Main()!` message displays immediately, while the secondary thread is occupied attending to its business.


C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Docume...
***** Async Delegate Invocation *****
Main() invoked on thread 1.
Add() invoked on thread 3.
Doing more work in Main()!
10 + 10 is 20.

Figure 14-2. *Methods invoked asynchronously are done so on a unique thread.*

Synchronizing the Calling Thread

If you ponder the current implementation of `Main()`, you might have realized that the time span between calling `BeginInvoke()` and `EndInvoke()` is clearly less than five seconds. Therefore, once `Doing more work in Main()!` prints to the console, the calling thread is now blocked and waiting for the secondary thread to complete before being able to obtain the result of the `Add()` method. Therefore, you are effectively making yet another *synchronous call*:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(Add);
    IAsyncResult iftAR = b.BeginInvoke(10, 10, null, null);

    // This call takes far less than 5 seconds!
    Console.WriteLine("Doing more work in Main()!");

    // The calling thread is now blocked until
    // EndInvoke() completes.
    int answer = b.EndInvoke(iftAR);
...
}
```

Obviously, asynchronous delegates would lose their appeal if the calling thread had the potential of being blocked under various circumstances. To allow the calling thread to discover if the asynchronously invoked method has completed its work, the `IAsyncResult` interface provides the `IsCompleted` property. Using this member, the calling thread is able to determine if the asynchronous call has indeed completed before calling `EndInvoke()`. If the method has not completed, `IsCompleted` returns `false`, and the calling thread is free to carry on its work. If `IsCompleted` returns `true`, the calling thread is able to obtain the result in the "least blocking manner" possible. Ponder the following update to the `Main()` method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(Add);
    IAsyncResult iftAR = b.BeginInvoke(10, 10, null, null);

    // This message will keep printing until
    // the Add() method is finished.
    while(!iftAR.IsCompleted)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Doing more work in Main()!");
    }
```

```
    // Now we know the Add() method is complete.
    int answer = b.EndInvoke(iftAR);
...
}
```

Here, you enter a loop that will continue processing the `Console.WriteLine()` statement until the secondary thread has completed. Once this has occurred, you can obtain the result of the `Add()` method knowing full well the method has indeed completed.

In addition to the `IsCompleted` property, the `IAsyncResult` interface provides the `AsyncWaitHandle` property for more flexible waiting logic. This property returns an instance of the `WaitHandle` type, which exposes a method named `WaitOne()`. The benefit of `WaitHandle.WaitOne()` is that you can specify the maximum wait time. If the specified amount of time is exceeded, `WaitOne()` returns false. Ponder the following updated `while` loop:

```
while (!iftAR.AsyncWaitHandle.WaitOne(2000, true))
{
    Console.WriteLine("Doing more work in Main()!");
}
```

While these properties of `IAsyncResult` do provide a way to synchronize the calling thread, they are not the most efficient approach. In many ways, the `IsCompleted` property is much like a really annoying manager (or classmate) who is constantly asking, "Are you done yet?" Thankfully, delegates provide a number of additional (and more effective) techniques to obtain the result of a method that has been called asynchronously.

■ **Source Code** The AsyncDelegate project is located under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

The Role of the AsyncCallback Delegate

Rather than polling a delegate to determine if an asynchronously method has completed, it would be ideal to have the delegate inform the calling thread when the task is finished. When you wish to enable this behavior, you will need to supply an instance of the `System.AsyncCallback` delegate as a parameter to `BeginInvoke()`, which up until this point has been `null`. However, when you do supply an `AsyncCallback` object, the delegate will call the specified method automatically when the asynchronous call has completed.

Like any delegate, `AsyncCallback` can only invoke methods that match a specific pattern, which in this case is a method taking `IAsyncResult` as the sole parameter and returning nothing:

```
void MyAsyncCallbackMethod(IAsyncResult itfAR)
```

Assume you have another application making use of the `BinaryOp` delegate. This time, however, you will not poll the delegate to determine if the `Add()` method has completed. Rather, you will define a static method named `AddComplete()` to receive the notification that the asynchronous invocation is finished:

```
namespace AsyncCallbackDelegate
{
    public delegate int BinaryOp(int x, int y);

    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("*****  AsyncCallbackDelegate Example *****");
```

```
            Console.WriteLine("Main() invoked on thread {0}.",
                Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

            BinaryOp b = new BinaryOp(Add);
            IAsyncResult iftAR = b.BeginInvoke(10, 10,
                new AsyncCallback(AddComplete), null);

            // Other work performed here...

            Console.ReadLine();
        }

        static void AddComplete(IAsyncResult itfAR)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("AddComplete() invoked on thread {0}.",
                Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());
            Console.WriteLine("Your addition is complete");
        }

        static int Add(int x, int y)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("Add() invoked on thread {0}.",
                Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());
            Thread.Sleep(5000);
            return x + y;
        }
    }
}
```

Again, the static `AddComplete()` method will be invoked by the `AsyncCallback` delegate when the `Add()` method has completed. If you run this program, you can confirm that the secondary thread is the thread invoking the `AddComplete()` callback (see Figure 14-3).

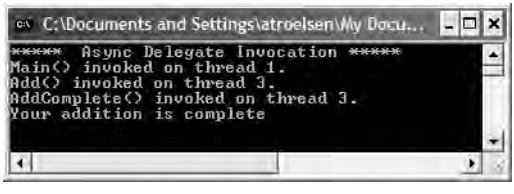

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Docu...
***** Async Delegate Invocation *****
Main() invoked on thread 1.
Add() invoked on thread 3.
AddComplete() invoked on thread 3.
Your addition is complete

Figure 14-3. *The* `AsyncCallback` *delegate in action*

The Role of the AsyncResult Class

You may have noticed in the current example that the `Main()` method is not caching the `IAsyncResult` type returned from `BeginInvoke()` and is no longer calling `EndInvoke()`. The reason is that the target of the `AsyncCallback` delegate (`AddComplete()` in this example) does not have access to the original `BinaryOp` delegate created in the scope of `Main()`. While you could simply declare the `BinaryOp` variable as a static class member to allow both methods to access the same object, a more elegant solution is to use the incoming `IAsyncResult` parameter.

The incoming `IAsyncResult` parameter passed into the target of the `AsyncCallback` delegate is actually an instance of the `AsyncResult` class (note the lack of an `I` prefix) defined in the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging` namespace. The static `AsyncDelegate` property returns a reference to

the original asynchronous delegate that was created elsewhere. Therefore, if you wish to obtain a reference to the BinaryOp delegate object allocated within Main(), simply cast the System.Object returned by the AsyncDelegate property into type BinaryOp. At this point, you can trigger EndInvoke() as expected:

```
// Don't forget to add a 'using' directive for
// System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging!
static void AddComplete(IAsyncResult itfAR)
{
    Console.WriteLine("AddComplete() invoked on thread {0}.",
        Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());
    Console.WriteLine("Your addition is complete");

    // Now get the result.
    AsyncResult ar = (AsyncResult)itfAR;
    BinaryOp b = (BinaryOp)ar.AsyncDelegate;
    Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 is {0}.", b.EndInvoke(itfAR));
}
```

Passing and Receiving Custom State Data

The final aspect of asynchronous delegates we need to address is the final argument to the BeginInvoke() method (which has been null up to this point). This parameter allows you to pass additional state information to the callback method from the primary thread. Because this argument is prototyped as a System.Object, you can pass in any type of data whatsoever, as long as the callback method knows what to expect. Assume for the sake of demonstration that the primary thread wishes to pass in a custom text message to the AddComplete() method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     IAsyncResult iftAR = b.BeginInvoke(10, 10,
          new AsyncCallback(AddComplete),
          "Main() thanks you for adding these numbers.");
...
}
```

To obtain this data within the scope of AddComplete(), make use of the AsyncState property of the incoming IAsyncResult parameter:

```
static void AddComplete(IAsyncResult itfAR)
{
...
    // Retrieve the informational object and cast it to string
    string msg = (string)itfAR.AsyncState;
    Console.WriteLine(msg);
}
```

Figure 14-4 shows the output of the current application.

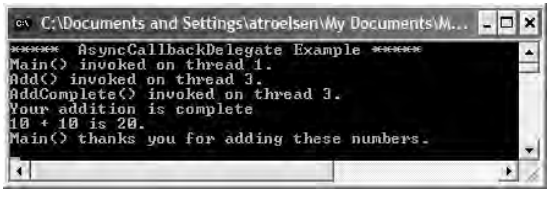

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\M...
***** AsyncCallbackDelegate Example *****
Main() invoked on thread 1.
Add() invoked on thread 3.
AddComplete() invoked on thread 3.
Your addition is complete
10 + 10 is 20.
Main() thanks you for adding these numbers.

Figure 14-4. *Passing and receiving custom state data*

Cool! Now that you understand how a .NET delegate can be used to automatically spin off a secondary thread of execution to handle an asynchronous method invocation, let's turn our attention to directly interacting with threads using the `System.Threading` namespace.

■ **Source Code** The AsyncCallbackDelegate project is located under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

The System.Threading Namespace

Under the .NET platform, the `System.Threading` namespace provides a number of types that enable the construction of multithreaded applications. In addition to providing types that allow you to interact with a particular CLR thread, this namespace defines types that allow access to the CLR maintained thread pool, a simple (non–GUI-based) `Timer` class, and numerous types used to provide synchronized access to shared resources. Table 14-1 lists some of the core members of this namespace. (Be sure to consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details.)

Table 14-1. *Select Types of the* `System.Threading` *Namespace*

Type	Meaning in Life
`Interlocked`	This type provides atomic operations for types that are shared by multiple threads.
`Monitor`	This type provides the synchronization of threading objects using locks and wait/signals. The C# `lock` keyword makes use of a `Monitor` type under the hood.
`Mutex`	This synchronization primitive can be used for synchronization between application domain boundaries.
`ParameterizedThreadStart`	This delegate (which is new to .NET 2.0) allows a thread to call methods that take any number of arguments.
`Semaphore`	This type allows you to limit the number of threads that can access a resource, or a particular type of resource, concurrently.
`Thread`	This type represents a thread that executes within the CLR. Using this type, you are able to spawn additional threads in the originating AppDomain.
`ThreadPool`	This type allows you to interact with the CLR-maintained thread pool within a given process.
`ThreadPriority`	This enum represents a thread's priority level (`Highest`, `Normal`, etc.).
`ThreadStart`	This delegate is used to specify the method to call for a given thread. Unlike the `ParameterizedThreadStart` delegate, targets of `ThreadStart` must match a fixed prototype.
`ThreadState`	This enum specifies the valid states a thread may take (`Running`, `Aborted`, etc.).
`Timer`	This type provides a mechanism for executing a method at specified intervals.
`TimerCallback`	This delegate type is used in conjunction with `Timer` types.

The System.Threading.Thread Class

The most primitive of all types in the `System.Threading` namespace is `Thread`. This class represents an object-oriented wrapper around a given path of execution within a particular AppDomain. This type also defines a number of methods (both static and shared) that allow you to create new threads within the current AppDomain, as well as to suspend, stop, and destroy a particular thread. Consider the list of core static members in Table 14-2.

Table 14-2. *Key Static Members of the* `Thread` *Type*

Static Member	Meaning in Life
`CurrentContext`	This read-only property returns the context in which the thread is currently running.
`CurrentThread`	This read-only property returns a reference to the currently running thread.
`GetDomain()` `GetDomainID()`	These methods return a reference to the current AppDomain or the ID of this domain in which the current thread is running.
`Sleep()`	This method suspends the current thread for a specified time.

The `Thread` class also supports several instance-level members, some of which are shown in Table 14-3.

Table 14-3. *Select Instance-Level Members of the* `Thread` *Type*

Instance-Level Member	Meaning in Life
`IsAlive`	Returns a Boolean that indicates whether this thread has been started.
`IsBackground`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether or not this thread is a "background thread" (more details in just a moment).
`Name`	Allows you to establish a friendly text name of the thread.
`Priority`	Gets or sets the priority of a thread, which may be assigned a value from the `ThreadPriority` enumeration.
`ThreadState`	Gets the state of this thread, which may be assigned a value from the `ThreadState` enumeration.
`Abort()`	Instructs the CLR to terminate the thread as soon as possible.
`Interrupt()`	Interrupts (e.g., wakes) the current thread from a suitable wait period.
`Join()`	Blocks the calling thread until the specified thread (the one on which `Join()` is called) exits.
`Resume()`	Resumes a thread that has been previously suspended.
`Start()`	Instructs the CLR to execute the thread ASAP.
`Suspend()`	Suspends the thread. If the thread is already suspended, a call to `Suspend()` has no effect.

Obtaining Statistics About the Current Thread

Recall that the entry point of an executable assembly (i.e., the `Main()` method) runs on the primary thread of execution. To illustrate the basic use of the `Thread` type, assume you have a new console

application named ThreadStats. As you know, the static Thread.CurrentThread property retrieves a Thread type that represents the currently executing thread. Once you have obtained the current thread, you are able to print out various statistics:

```
// Be sure to 'use' the System.Threading namespace.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Primary Thread stats *****\n");

    // Obtain and name the current thread.
    Thread primaryThread = Thread.CurrentThread;
    primaryThread.Name = "ThePrimaryThread";

    // Show details of hosting AppDomain/Context.
    Console.WriteLine("Name of current AppDomain: {0}",
        Thread.GetDomain().FriendlyName);
    Console.WriteLine("ID of current Context: {0}",
        Thread.CurrentContext.ContextID);

    // Print out some stats about this thread.
    Console.WriteLine("Thread Name: {0}",
        primaryThread.Name);
    Console.WriteLine("Has thread started?: {0}",
        primaryThread.IsAlive);
    Console.WriteLine("Priority Level: {0}",
        primaryThread.Priority);
    Console.WriteLine("Thread State: {0}",
        primaryThread.ThreadState);
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Figure 14-5 shows the output for the current application.

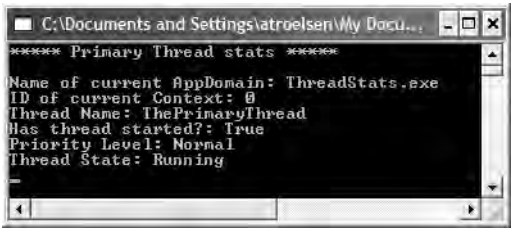

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Docu...
***** Primary Thread stats *****
Name of current AppDomain: ThreadStats.exe
ID of current Context: 0
Thread Name: ThePrimaryThread
Has thread started?: True
Priority Level: Normal
Thread State: Running

Figure 14-5. *Gathering thread statistics*

The Name Property

While this code is more or less self-explanatory, do notice that the Thread class supports a property called Name. If you do not set this value, Name will return an empty string. However, once you assign a friendly string moniker to a given Thread object, you can greatly simplify your debugging endeavors. If you are making use of Visual Studio 2005, you may access the Threads window during a debugging session (select Debug ➤ Windows ➤ Threads). As you can see from Figure 14-6, you can quickly identify the thread you wish to diagnose.

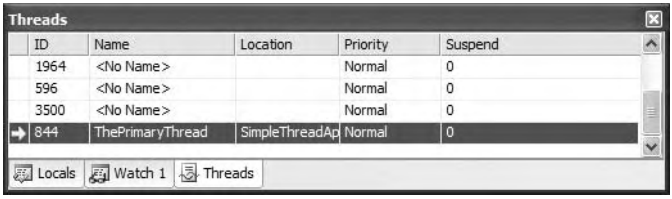


Figure 14-6. *Debugging a thread with Visual Studio 2005*

The Priority Property

Next, notice that the `Thread` type defines a property named `Priority`. By default, all threads have a priority level of `Normal`. However, you can change this at any point in the thread's lifetime using the `ThreadPriority` property and the related `System.Threading.ThreadPriority` enumeration:

```
public enum ThreadPriority
{
    AboveNormal,
    BelowNormal,
    Highest,
    Idle,
    Lowest,
    Normal,    // Default value.
    TimeCritical
}
```

If you were to assign a thread's priority level to a value other than the default (`ThreadPriority.Normal`), understand that you would have little control over when the thread scheduler switches between threads. In reality, a thread's priority level offers a hint to the CLR regarding the importance of the thread's activity. Thus, a thread with the value `ThreadPriority.Highest` is not necessarily guaranteed to given the highest precedence.

Again, if the thread scheduler is preoccupied with a given task (e.g., synchronizing an object, switching threads, or moving threads), the priority level will most likely be altered accordingly. However, all things being equal, the CLR will read these values and instruct the thread scheduler how to best allocate time slices. All things still being equal, threads with an identical thread priority should each receive the same amount of time to perform their work.

In most cases, you will seldom (if ever) need to directly alter a thread's priority level. In theory, it is possible to jack up the priority level on a set of threads, thereby preventing lower-priority threads from executing at their required levels (so use caution).

■ **Source Code** The ThreadStats project is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

Programmatically Creating Secondary Threads

When you wish to programmatically create additional threads to carry on some unit of work, you will follow a very predictable process:

1. Create a type method to be the entry point for the new thread.
2. Create a new `ParameterizedThreadStart` (or legacy `ThreadStart`) delegate, passing the address of the method defined in step 1 to the constructor.

3. Create a `Thread` object, passing the `ParameterizedThreadStart/ThreadStart` delegate as a constructor argument.
4. Establish any initial thread characteristics (name, priority, etc.).
5. Call the `Thread.Start()` method. This starts the thread at the method referenced by the delegate created in step 2 as soon as possible.

As stated in step 2, you may make use of two distinct delegate types to "point to" the method that the secondary thread will execute. The `ThreadStart` delegate has been part of the `System.Threading` namespace since .NET 1.0, and it can point to any method that takes no arguments and returns nothing. This delegate can be helpful when the method is designed to simply run in the background without further interaction.

The obvious limitation of `ThreadStart` is that you are unable to pass in parameters for processing. As of .NET 2.0, you are provided with the `ParameterizedThreadStart` delegate type, which allows a single parameter of type `System.Object`. Given that anything can be represented as a `System.Object`, you can pass in any number of parameters via a custom class or structure. Do note, however, that the `ParameterizedThreadStart` delegate can only point to methods that return `void`.

Working with the ThreadStart Delegate

To illustrate the process of building a multithreaded application (as well as to demonstrate the usefulness of doing so), assume you have a console application (SimpleMultiThreadApp) that allows the end user to choose whether the application will perform its duties using the single primary thread or split its workload using two separate threads of execution.

Assuming you have "used" the `System.Threading` namespace via the C# `using` keyword, your first step is to define a type method to perform the work of the (possible) secondary thread. To keep focused on the mechanics of building multithreaded programs, this method will simply print out a sequence of numbers to the console window, pausing for approximately two seconds with each pass. Here is the full definition of the `Printer` class:

```
public class Printer
{
    public void PrintNumbers()
    {
        // Display Thread info.
        Console.WriteLine("-> {0} is executing PrintNumbers()",
            Thread.CurrentThread.Name);

        // Print out numbers.
        Console.Write("Your numbers: ");
        for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        {
            Console.Write(i + ", ");
            Thread.Sleep(2000);
        }
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
}
```

Now, within `Main()`, you will first prompt the user to determine if one or two threads will be used to perform the application's work. If the user requests a single thread, you will simply invoke the `PrintNumbers()` method within the primary thread. However, if the user specifies two threads, you will create a `ThreadStart` delegate that points to `PrintNumbers()`, pass this delegate object into the constructor of a new `Thread` object, and call `Start()` to inform the CLR this thread is ready for processing.

To begin, set a reference to the `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assembly and display a message within `Main()` using `MessageBox.Show()` (you'll see the point of doing so once you run the program). Here is the complete implementation of `Main()`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** The Amazing Thread App *****\n");
     Console.Write("Do you want [1] or [2] threads? ");
     string threadCount = Console.ReadLine();

     // Name the current thread.
     Thread primaryThread = Thread.CurrentThread;
     primaryThread.Name = "Primary";

     // Display Thread info.
     Console.WriteLine("-> {0} is executing Main()",
     Thread.CurrentThread.Name);

     // Make worker class.
     Printer p = new Printer();

     switch(threadCount)
     {
          case  "2":
               // Now make the thread.
               Thread backgroundThread =
                    new Thread(new ThreadStart(p.PrintNumbers));
               backgroundThread.Name = "Secondary";
               backgroundThread.Start();
          break;
          case "1":
               p.PrintNumbers();
          break;
          default:
               Console.WriteLine("I don't know what you want...you get 1 thread.");
               goto case "1";
     }

     // Do some additional work.
     MessageBox.Show("I'm busy!", "Work on main thread...");
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Now, if you run this program with a single thread, you will find that the final message box will not display the message until the entire sequence of numbers has printed to the console. As you are explicitly pausing for approximately two seconds after each number is printed, this will result in a less-than-stellar end user experience. However, if you select two threads, the message box displays instantly, given that a unique `Thread` object is responsible for printing out the numbers to the console (see Figure 14-7).


***** The Amazing Thread App *****
Do you want [1] or [2] threads? 2
-> Primary is executing Main()
-> Secondary is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4,
Work on main thread...
I'm busy!
OK

Figure 14-7. *Multithreaded applications provide results in more responsive applications.*

Before we move on, it is important to note that when you build multithreaded applications (which includes the use of asynchronous delegates) on single CPU machines, you do not end up with an application that *runs* any faster, as that is a function of a machine's CPU. When running this application using either one or two threads, the numbers are still displaying at the same pace. In reality, multithreaded applications result in *more responsive* applications. To the end user, it may appear that the program is "faster," but this is not the case. Threads have no power to make `foreach` loops execute quicker, to make paper print faster, or to force numbers to be added together at rocket speed. Multithreaded applications simply allow multiple threads to share the workload.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleMultiThreadApp project is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

Working with the ParameterizedThreadStart Delegate

Recall that the `ThreadStart` delegate can point only to methods that return `void` and take no arguments. While this may fit the bill in many cases, if you wish to pass data to the method executing on the secondary thread, you will need to make use of the `ParameterizedThreadStart` delegate type. To illustrate, let's re-create the logic of the `AsyncCallbackDelegate` project created earlier in this chapter, this time making use of the `ParameterizedThreadStart` delegate type.

To begin, create a new console application named AddWithThreads and "use" the `System.Threading` namespace. Now, given that `ParameterizedThreadStart` can point to any method taking a `System.Object` parameter, you will create a custom type containing the numbers to be added:

```
class AddParams
{
    public int a;
    public int b;

    public AddParams(int numb1, int numb2)
    {
        a = numb1;
        b = numb2;
    }
}
```

Next, create a static method in the `Program` class that will take an `AddParams` type and print out the summation of each value:

```
public static void Add(object data)
{
    if (data is AddParams)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("ID of thread in Main(): {0}",
            Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

        AddParams ap = (AddParams)data;
        Console.WriteLine("{0} + {1} is {2}",
            ap.a, ap.b, ap.a + ap.b);
    }
}
```

The code within `Main()` is straightforward. Simply use `ParameterizedThreadStart` rather than `ThreadStart`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Adding with Thread objects *****");
     Console.WriteLine("ID of thread in Main(): {0}",
          Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

     AddParams ap = new AddParams(10, 10);
     Thread t = new Thread(new ParameterizedThreadStart(Add));
     t.Start(ap);
...
}
```

■ **Source Code** The AddWithThreads project is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

Foreground Threads and Background Threads

Now that you have seen how to programmatically create new threads of execution using the `System.Threading` namespace, let's formalize the distinction between foreground threads and background threads:

- *Foreground threads* have the ability to prevent the current application from terminating. The CLR will not shut down an application (which is to say, unload the hosting AppDomain) until all foreground threads have ended.
- *Background threads* (sometimes called *daemon threads*) are viewed by the CLR as expendable paths of execution that can be ignored at any point in time (even if they are currently laboring over some unit of work). Thus, if all foreground threads have terminated, any and all background threads are automatically killed when the application domain unloads.

It is important to note that foreground and background threads are *not* synonymous with primary and worker threads. By default, every thread you create via the `Thread.Start()` method is automatically a *foreground* thread. Again, this means that the AppDomain will not unload until all threads of execution have completed their units of work. In most cases, this is exactly the behavior you require.

For the sake of argument, however, assume that you wish to invoke `Printer.PrintNumbers()` on a secondary thread that should behave as a background thread. Again, this means that the method pointed to by the `Thread` type (via the `ThreadStart` or `ParameterizedThreadStart` delegate) should be able to halt safely as soon as all foreground threads are done with their work. Configuring such a thread is as simple as setting the `IsBackground` property to true:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Printer p = new Printer();
    Thread bgroundThread =
        new Thread(new ThreadStart(p.PrintNumbers));
    bgroundThread.IsBackground = true;
    bgroundThread.Start();
}
```

Notice that this `Main()` method is *not* making a call to `Console.ReadLine()` to force the console to remain visible until you press the Enter key. Thus, when you run the application, it will shut down immediately because the `Thread` object has been configured as a background thread. Given that the `Main()` method triggers the creation of the primary *foreground* thread, as soon as the logic in `Main()` completes, the AppDomain unloads before the secondary thread is able to complete its work. However, if you comment out the line that sets the `IsBackground` property, you will find that each number prints to the console, as all foreground threads must finish their work before the AppDomain is unloaded from the hosting process.

For the most part, configuring a thread to run as a background type can be helpful when the worker thread in question is performing a noncritical task that is no longer needed when the main task of the program is finished.

■ **Source Code** The BackgroundThread project is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

The Issue of Concurrency

All the multithreaded sample applications you have written over the course of this chapter have been thread-safe, given that only a single `Thread` object was executing the method in question. While some of your applications may be this simplistic in nature, a good deal of your multithreaded applications may contain numerous secondary threads. Given that all threads in an AppDomain have concurrent access to the shared data of the application, imagine what might happen if multiple threads were accessing the same point of data. As the thread scheduler will force threads to suspend their work at random, what if thread A is kicked out of the way before it has fully completed its work? Thread B is now reading unstable data.

To illustrate the problem of concurrency, let's build another C# console application named MultiThreadedPrinting. This application will once again make use of the `Printer` class created previously, but this time the `PrintNumbers()` method will force the current thread to pause for a randomly generated amount of time:

```
public class Printer
{
    public void PrintNumbers()
    {
...
        for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        {
            Random r = new Random();
            Thread.Sleep(1000 * r.Next(5));
            Console.Write(i + ", ");
        }
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
}
```

The `Main()` method is responsible for creating an array of ten (uniquely named) `Thread` objects, each of which is making calls on the same instance of the `Printer` object:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("*****Synchronizing Threads *****\n");

        Printer p = new Printer();

        // Make 10 threads that are all pointing to the same
        // method on the same object.
        Thread[] threads = new Thread[10];
        for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        {
            threads[i] =
                new Thread(new ThreadStart(p.PrintNumbers));
            threads[i].Name = string.Format("Worker thread #{0}", i);
        }

        // Now start each one.
        foreach (Thread t in threads)
            t.Start();
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Before looking at some test runs, let's recap the problem. The primary thread within this AppDomain begins life by spawning ten secondary worker threads. Each worker thread is told to make calls on the `PrintNumbers()` method on the same `Printer` instance. Given that you have taken no precautions to lock down this object's shared resources (the console), there is a good chance that the current thread will be kicked out of the way before the `PrintNumbers()` method is able to print out the complete results. Because you don't know exactly when (or if) this might happen, you are bound to get unpredictable results. For example, you might find the output shown in Figure 14-8.


C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Platform 3r...
-> Worker thread #0 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #1 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #2 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #3 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #4 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #5 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #6 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #7 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #8 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #9 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 2,
2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4,
4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7
, 7, 7, 7, 7, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,

Figure 14-8. *Concurrency in action, take one*

Now run the application a few more times. Figure 14-9 shows another possibility (your results will obviously differ).


C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My Books\C# and the .NET Platform 3r...
-> Worker thread #0 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, -> Worker thread #1 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #2 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #3 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #4 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #5 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #6 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #7 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #8 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: -> Worker thread #9 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 3, 2,
2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 4, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4,
4, 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 7, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 8, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7
, 7, 7, 7, 7, 9,
8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,
9,

Figure 14-9. *Concurrency in action, take two*

There are clearly some problems here. As each thread is telling the `Printer` to print out the numerical data, the thread scheduler is happily swapping threads in the background. The result is inconsistent output. What we need is a way to programmatically enforce synchronized access to the shared resources. As you would guess, the `System.Threading` namespace provides a number of synchronization-centric types. The C# programming language also provides a particular keyword for the very task of synchronizing shared data in multithreaded applications.

■ **Note** If you are unable to generate unpredictable outputs, increase the number of threads from 10 to 100 (for example) or introduce a call to `Thread.Sleep()` within your program. Eventually, you will encounter the concurrency issue.

Synchronization Using the C# lock Keyword

The first technique you can use to synchronize access to shared resources is the C# `lock` keyword. This keyword allows you to define a scope of statements that must be synchronized between threads. By doing so, incoming threads cannot interrupt the current thread, preventing it from finishing its work. The `lock` keyword requires you to specify a *token* (an object reference) that must be acquired by a thread to enter within the lock scope. When you are attempting to lock down an instance-level method, you can simply pass in a reference to the current type:

```
// Use the current object as the thread token.
lock(this)
{
     // All code within this scope is thread-safe.
}
```

If you examine the `PrintNumbers()` method, you can see that the shared resource the threads are competing to gain access to is the console window. Therefore, if you scope all interactions with the `Console` type within a lock scope as so:

```
public void PrintNumbers()
{
    lock (this)
    {
        // Display Thread info.
        Console.WriteLine("-> {0} is executing PrintNumbers()",
            Thread.CurrentThread.Name);

        // Print out numbers.
        Console.Write("Your numbers: ");
        for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        {
            Random r = new Random();
            Thread.Sleep(1000 * r.Next(5));
            Console.Write(i + ", ");
        }
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
}
```

you have effectively designed a method that will allow the current thread to complete its task. Once a thread enters into a lock scope, the lock token (in this case, a reference to the current object) is inaccessible by other threads until the lock is released once the lock scope has exited. Thus, if thread A has obtained the lock token, other threads are unable to enter the scope until thread A relinquishes the lock token.

■ **Note** If you are attempting to lock down code in a static method, you obviously cannot use the `this` keyword. If this is the case, you can simply pass in the `System.Type` of the respective class using the C# `typeof` operator.

If you now run the application, you can see that each thread has ample opportunity to finish its business (see Figure 14-10).

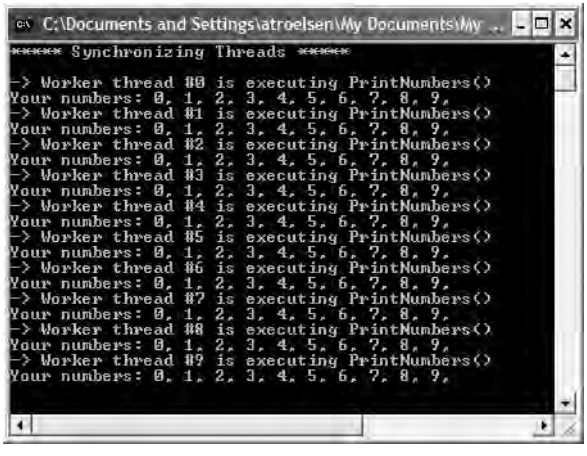

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Documents\My ...
***** Synchronizing Threads *****
-> Worker thread #0 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #1 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #2 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #3 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #4 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #5 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #6 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #7 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #8 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
-> Worker thread #9 is executing PrintNumbers()
Your numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,

Figure 14-10. *Concurrency in action, take three*

■ **Source Code** The MultiThreadedPrinting application is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

Synchronization Using the System.Threading.Monitor Type

The C# `lock` statement is really just a shorthand notation for working with the `System.Threading.Monitor` class type. Once processed by the C# compiler, a lock scope actually resolves to the following (which you can verify using `ildasm.exe`):

```
public void PrintNumbers()
{
    Monitor.Enter(this);
    try
    {
        // Display Thread info.
        Console.WriteLine("-> {0} is executing PrintNumbers()",
            Thread.CurrentThread.Name);

        // Print out numbers.
        Console.Write("Your numbers: ");
        for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        {
            Random r = new Random();
            Thread.Sleep(1000 * r.Next(5));
            Console.Write(i + ", ");
        }
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
    finally
    {
        Monitor.Exit(this);
    }
}
```

First, notice that the `Monitor.Enter()` method is the ultimate recipient of the thread token you specified as the argument to the `lock` keyword. Next, all code within a lock scope is wrapped within a `try` block. The corresponding `finally` clause ensures that the thread token is released (via the `Monitor.Exit()` method), regardless of any possible runtime exception. If you were to modify the MultiThreadSharedData program to make direct use of the `Monitor` type (as just shown), you will find the output is identical.

Now, given that the `lock` keyword seems to require less code than making explicit use of the `System.Threading.Monitor` type, you may wonder about the benefits of using the `Monitor` type directly. The short answer is control. If you make use of the `Monitor` type, you are able to instruct the active thread to wait for some duration of time (via the `Wait()` method), inform waiting threads when the current thread is completed (via the `Pulse()` and `PulseAll()` methods), and so on.

As you would expect, in a great number of cases, the C# `lock` keyword will fit the bill. However, if you are interested in checking out additional members of the `Monitor` class, consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Synchronization Using the System.Threading.Interlocked Type

Although it always is hard to believe until you look at the underlying CIL code, assignments and simple arithmetic operations are *not atomic*. For this reason, the `System.Threading` namespace provides a type that allows you to operate on a single point of data atomically with less overhead than with the `Monitor` type. The `Interlocked` class type defines the static members shown in Table 14-4.

Table 14-4. *Members of the* `System.Threading.Interlocked` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`CompareExchange()`	Safely tests two values for equality and, if equal, changes one of the values with a third
`Decrement()`	Safely decrements a value by 1
`Exchange()`	Safely swaps two values
`Increment()`	Safely increments a value by 1

Although it might not seem like it from the onset, the process of atomically altering a single value is quite common in a multithreaded environment. Assume you have a method named `AddOne()` that increments an integer member variable named `intVal`. Rather than writing synchronization code such as the following:

```
public void AddOne()
{
     lock(this)
     {
          intVal++;
     }
}
```

you can simplify your code via the static `Interlocked.Increment()` method. Simply pass in the variable to increment by reference. Do note that the `Increment()` method not only adjusts the value of the incoming parameter, but also returns the new value:

```
public void AddOne()
{
    int newVal = Interlocked.Increment(ref intVal);
}
```

In addition to `Increment()` and `Decrement()`, the `Interlocked` type allows you to atomically assign numerical and object data. For example, if you wish to assign the value of a member variable to the value 83, you can avoid the need to use an explicit `lock` statement (or explicit `Monitor` logic) and make use of the `Interlocked.Exchange()` method:

```
public void SafeAssignment()
{
     Interlocked.Exchange(ref myInt, 83);
}
```

Finally, if you wish to test two values for equality to change the point of comparison in a thread-safe manner, you are able to leverage the `Interlocked.CompareExchange()` method as follows:

```
public void CompareAndExchange()
{
     // If the value of i is currently 83, change i to 99.
     Interlocked.CompareExchange(ref i, 99, 83);
}
```

Synchronization Using the [Synchronization] Attribute

The final synchronization primitive examined here is the `[Synchronization]` attribute, which is a member of the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts` namespace. In essence, this class-level attribute effectively locks down *all* instance member code of the object for thread safety. When the CLR allocates objects attributed with `[Synchronization]`, it will place the object within a synchronized

context. As you may recall from Chapter 13, objects that should not be removed from a contextual boundary should derive from `ContextBoundObject`. Therefore, if you wish to make the `Printer` class type thread-safe (without explicitly writing thread-safe code within the class members), you could update the definition as so:

```
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts;
...

// All methods of Printer are now thread-safe!
[Synchronization]
public class Printer : ContextBoundObject
{
     public void PrintNumbers()
     {
          ...
     }
}
```

In some ways, this approach can be seen as the lazy way to write thread-safe code, given that you are not required to dive into the details about which aspects of the type are truly manipulating thread-sensitive data. The major downfall of this approach, however, is that even if a given method is not making use of thread-sensitive data, the CLR will *still* lock invocations to the method. Obviously, this could degrade the overall functionality of the type, so use this technique with care.

At this point, you have seen a number of ways you are able to provide synchronized access to shared blocks of data. To be sure, additional types are available under the `System.Threading` namespace, which I will encourage you to explore at your leisure. To wrap up our examination of thread programming, allow me to introduce three additional types: `TimerCallback`, `Timer`, and `ThreadPool`.

Programming with Timer Callbacks

Many applications have the need to call a specific method during regular intervals of time. For example, you may have an application that needs to display the current time on a status bar via a given helper function. As another example, you may wish to have your application call a helper function every so often to perform noncritical background tasks such as checking for new e-mail messages. For situations such as these, you can use the `System.Threading.Timer` type in conjunction with a related delegate named `TimerCallback`.

To illustrate, assume you have a console application that will print the current time every second until the user presses a key to terminate the application. The first obvious step is to write the method that will be called by the `Timer` type:

```
class TimePrinter
{
     static void PrintTime(object state)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Time is: {0}",
               DateTime.Now.ToLongTimeString());
     }
}
```

Notice how this method has a single parameter of type `System.Object` and returns `void`. This is not optional, given that the `TimerCallback` delegate can only call methods that match this signature. The value passed into the target of your `TimerCallback` delegate can be any bit of information whatsoever (in the case of the e-mail example, this parameter might represent the name of the Microsoft Exchange server to interact with during the process). Also note that given that this parameter is indeed a `System.Object`, you are able to pass in multiple arguments using a `System.Array` or custom class/structure.

The next step is to configure an instance of the `TimerCallback` delegate and pass it into the `Timer` object. In addition to configuring a `TimerCallback` delegate, the `Timer` constructor allows you to specify the optional parameter information to pass into the delegate target (defined as a `System.Object`), the interval to poll the method, and the amount of time to wait (in milliseconds) before making the first call, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Working with Timer type *****\n");

     // Create the delegate for the Timer type.
     TimerCallback timeCB = new TimerCallback(PrintTime);

     // Establish timer settings.
     Timer t = new Timer(
         timeCB,     // The TimerCallback delegate type.
         "Hi",       // Any info to pass into the called method (null for no info).
         0,          // Amount of time to wait before starting.
         1000);      // Interval of time between calls (in milliseconds).

     Console.WriteLine("Hit key to terminate...");
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

In this case, the `PrintTime()` method will be called roughly every second and will pass in no additional information to said method. If you did wish to send in some information for use by the delegate target, simply substitute the null value of the second constructor parameter with the appropriate information. For example, ponder the following updates:

```
static void PrintTime(object state)
{
     Console.WriteLine("Time is: {0}, Param is: {1}",
          DateTime.Now.ToLongTimeString(), state.ToString());
}
```

Figure 14-11 shows the output.

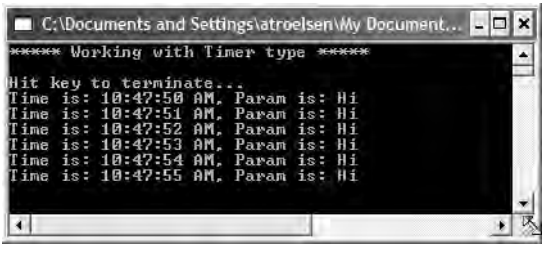

C:\Documents and Settings\atroelsen\My Document...
***** Working with Timer type *****
Hit key to terminate...
Time is: 10:47:50 AM, Param is: Hi
Time is: 10:47:51 AM, Param is: Hi
Time is: 10:47:52 AM, Param is: Hi
Time is: 10:47:53 AM, Param is: Hi
Time is: 10:47:54 AM, Param is: Hi
Time is: 10:47:55 AM, Param is: Hi

Figure 14-11. *Timers at work*

■ **Source Code** The TimerApp application is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

Understanding the CLR ThreadPool

The final thread-centric topic we will examine in this chapter is the CLR thread pool. When you invoke a method asynchronously using delegate types (via the `BeginInvoke()` method), the CLR does not literally create a brand-new thread. For purposes of efficiency, a delegate's `BeginInvoke()` method leverages a pool of worker threads that is maintained by the runtime. To allow you to interact with this pool of waiting threads, the `System.Threading` namespace provides the `ThreadPool` class type.

If you wish to queue a method call for processing by a worker thread in the pool, you can make use of the `ThreadPool.QueueUserWorkItem()` method. This method has been overloaded to allow you to specify an optional `System.Object` for custom state data in addition to an instance of the `WaitCallback` delegate:

```
public sealed class ThreadPool
{
     ...
     public static bool QueueUserWorkItem(WaitCallback callBack);
     public static bool QueueUserWorkItem(WaitCallback callBack,
        object state);
}
```

The `WaitCallback` delegate can point to any method that takes a `System.Object` as its sole parameter (which represents the optional state data) and returns nothing. Do note that if you do not provide a `System.Object` when calling `QueueUserWorkItem()`, the CLR automatically passes a null value. To illustrate queuing methods for use by the CLR thread pool, ponder the following program, which makes use of the `Printer` type once again. In this case, however, you are not manually creating an array of `Thread` types; rather, you are assigning members of the pool to the `PrintNumbers()` method:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Main thread started. ThreadID = {0}",
            Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

        Printer p = new Printer();

        WaitCallback workItem = new WaitCallback(PrintTheNumbers);

        // Queue the method 10 times
        for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        {
            ThreadPool.QueueUserWorkItem(workItem, p);
        }

        Console.WriteLine("All tasks queued");
        Console.ReadLine();
    }

    static void PrintTheNumbers(object state)
    {
        Printer task = (Printer)state;
        task.PrintNumbers();
    }
}
```

At this point, you may be wondering if it would be advantageous to make use of the CLR-maintained thread pool rather than explicitly creating `Thread` objects. Consider these major benefits of leveraging the thread pool:

- The thread pool manages threads efficiently by minimizing the number of threads that must be created, started, and stopped.
- By using the thread pool, you can focus on your business problem rather than the application's threading infrastructure.

However, using manual thread management is preferred in some cases, for example:

- If you require foreground threads or must set the thread priority. Pooled threads are *always* background threads with default priority (`ThreadPriority.Normal`).
- If you require a thread with a fixed identity in order to abort it, suspend it, or discover it by name.

■ **Source Code** The ThreadPoolApp application is included under the Chapter 14 subdirectory.

That wraps up our examination of multithreaded programming under .NET. To be sure, the `System.Threading` namespace defines numerous types beyond what I had the space to cover in this chapter. Nevertheless, at this point you should have a solid foundation to build on.

Summary

This chapter began by examining how .NET delegate types can be configured to execute a method in an asynchronous manner. As you have seen, the `BeginInvoke()` and `EndInvoke()` methods allow you to indirectly manipulate a background thread with minimum fuss and bother. During this discussion, you were also introduced to the `IAsyncResult` interface and `AsyncResult` class type. As you learned, these types provide various ways to synchronize the calling thread and obtain possible method return values.

The remainder of this chapter examined the role of the `System.Threading` namespace. As you learned, when an application creates additional threads of execution, the result is that the program in question is able to carry out numerous tasks at (what appears to be) the same time. You also examined several manners in which you can protect thread-sensitive blocks of code to ensure that shared resources do not become unusable units of bogus data. Last but not least, you learned that the CLR maintains an internal pool of threads for the purposes of performance and convenience.

CHAPTER 15

Understanding CIL and the Role of Dynamic Assemblies

The goal of this chapter is twofold. In the first half (more or less), you will have a chance to examine the syntax and semantics of the common intermediate language (CIL) in much greater detail than in previous chapters. Now, to be perfectly honest, you are able to live a happy and productive life as a .NET programmer without concerning yourself with the details of CIL code. However, once you learn the basics of CIL, you will gain a much deeper understanding of how some of the "magical" aspects of .NET (such as cross-language inheritance) actually work.

In the remainder of this chapter, you will examine the role of the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace. Using these types, you are able to build software that is capable of generating .NET assemblies in memory at runtime. Formally speaking, assemblies defined and executed in memory are termed *dynamic assemblies*. As you might guess, this particular aspect of .NET development requires you to speak the language of CIL, given that you will be required to specify the CIL instruction set that will be used during the assembly's construction.

Reflecting on the Nature of CIL Programming

CIL is the true mother tongue of the .NET platform. When you build a .NET assembly using your managed language of choice, the associated compiler translates your source code into terms of CIL. Like any programming language, CIL provides numerous structural and implementation tokens. Given that CIL is just another .NET programming language, it should come as no surprise that it is possible to build your .NET assemblies directly using CIL and the CIL compiler (`ilasm.exe`) that ships with the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK.

Now while it is true that few programmers would choose to build an entire .NET application directly with CIL, CIL is still an extremely interesting intellectual pursuit. Simply put, the more you understand the grammar of CIL, the better able you are to move into the realm of advanced .NET development. By way of some concrete examples, individuals who possess an understanding of CIL are capable of the following:

- Talking intelligently about how different .NET programming languages map their respective keywords to CIL tokens.
- Disassembling an existing .NET assembly, editing the CIL code, and recompiling the updated code base into a modified .NET binary.
- Building dynamic assemblies using the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace.
- Leveraging aspects of the CTS that are not supported by higher-level managed languages, but do exist at the level of CIL. To be sure, CIL is the only .NET language that allows you to access each and every aspect of the CTS. For example, using raw CIL, you are able to define global-level members and fields (which are not permissible in C#).

Again, to be perfectly clear, if you choose *not* to concern yourself with the details of CIL code, you are absolutely able to gain mastery of the .NET base class libraries. In many ways, knowledge of CIL is analogous to a C(++) programmer's understanding of assembly language. Those who know the ins and outs of the low-level "goo" are able to create rather advanced solutions for the task at hand and gain a deeper understanding of the underlying programming (and runtime) environment. So, if you are up for the challenge, let's begin to examine the details of CIL.

■ **Note** Understand that this chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of the syntax and semantics of CIL. If you require a full examination of CIL, check out *CIL Programming: Under the Hood of .NET* by Jason Bock (Apress, 2002).

Examining CIL Directives, Attributes, and Opcodes

When you begin to investigate low-level languages such as CIL, you are guaranteed to find new (and often intimidating-sounding) names for very familiar concepts. For example, at this point in the text, if you were shown the following set of items:

```
{new, public, this, base, get, set, explicit, unsafe, enum, operator, partial}
```

you would most certainly understand them to be keywords of the C# language (which is correct). However, if you look more closely at the members of this set, you may be able to see that while each item is indeed a C# keyword, it has radically different semantics. For example, the `enum` keyword defines a `System.Enum`-derived type, while the `this` and `base` keywords allow you to reference the current object or the object's parent class, respectively. The `unsafe` keyword is used to establish a block of code that cannot be directly monitored by the CLR, while the `operator` keyword allows you to build a hidden (specially named) method that will be called when you apply a specific C# operator (such as the plus sign).

In stark contrast to a higher-level language such as C#, CIL does not just simply define a generic set of keywords, per se. Rather, the token set understood by the CIL compiler is subdivided into three broad categories based on semantic connotation:

- CIL directives
- CIL attributes
- CIL operation codes (opcodes)

Each category of CIL token is expressed using a particular syntax, and the tokens are combined to build a valid .NET assembly.

The Role of CIL Directives

First up, we have a set of well-known CIL tokens that are used to describe the overall structure of a .NET assembly. These tokens are called *directives*. CIL directives are used to inform the CIL compiler how to define the namespaces(s), type(s), and member(s) that will populate the assembly.

Directives are represented syntactically using a single dot (.) prefix (e.g., `.namespace`, `.class`, `.publickeytoken`, `.override`, `.method`, `.assembly`, etc.). Thus, if your `*.il` file (the conventional extension for a file containing CIL code) has a single `.namespace` directive and three `.class` directives, the CIL compiler will generate an assembly that defines a single .NET namespace containing three .NET class types.

The Role of CIL Attributes

In many cases, CIL directives in and of themselves are not descriptive enough to fully express the definition of a given .NET type or type member. Given this fact, many CIL directives can be further specified with various CIL *attributes* to qualify how a directive should be processed. For example, the `.class` directive can be adorned with the `public` attribute (to establish the type visibility), the `extends` attribute (to explicitly specify the type's base class), and the `implements` attribute (to list the set of interfaces supported by the type).

The Role of CIL Opcodes

Once a .NET assembly, namespace, and type set has been defined in terms of CIL using various directives and related attributes, the final remaining task is to provide the type's implementation logic. This is a job for *operation codes*, or simply *opcodes*. In the tradition of other low-level languages, CIL opcodes tend to be completely unpronounceable by us mere humans. For example, if you need to define a string variable, you don't use a friendly opcode named `LoadString`, but rather `ldstr`.

Now, to be fair, some CIL opcodes do map quite naturally to their C# counterparts (e.g., `box`, `unbox`, `throw`, and `sizeof`). As you will see, the opcodes of CIL are always used within the scope of a member's implementation, and unlike CIL directives, they are never written with a dot prefix.

The CIL Opcode/CIL Mnemonic Distinction

As just explained, opcodes such as `ldstr` are used to implement the members of a given type. In reality, however, tokens such as `ldstr` are *CIL mnemonics* for the actual *binary CIL opcodes*. To clarify the distinction, assume you have authored the following method in C#:

```
static int Add(int x, int y)
{
     return x + y;
}
```

The act of adding two numbers is expressed in terms of the CIL opcode `0X58`. In a similar vein, subtracting two numbers is expressed using the opcode `0X59`, and the act of allocating a new object on the managed heap is achieved using the `0X73` opcode. Given this reality, understand that the "CIL code" processed by a JIT compiler is actually nothing more than blobs of binary data.

Thankfully, for each binary opcode of CIL, there is a corresponding mnemonic. For example, the `add` mnemonic can be used rather than `0X58`, `sub` rather than `0X59`, and `newobj` rather than `0X73`. Given this opcode/mnemonic distinction, realize that CIL decompilers such as `ildasm.exe` translate an assembly's binary opcodes into their corresponding CIL mnemonics:

```
.method public hidebysig static int32 Add(int32 x,
     int32 y) cil managed
{
...
     // The 'add' token is a friendly mnemonic
     // for the 0X58 CIL opcode.
     add
...
}
```

Unless you're building some extremely low-level .NET software (such as a custom managed compiler), you'll never need to concern yourself with the literal numeric opcodes of CIL. For all practical purposes, when .NET programmers speak about "CIL opcodes" they're referring to the set of friendly string token mnemonics (as I've done within this text) rather than the underlying binary values.

Pushing and Popping: The Stack-Based Nature of CIL

Higher-level .NET languages (such as C#) attempt to hide low-level grunge from view as much as possible. One aspect of .NET development that is particularly well hidden is the fact that CIL is a completely stack-based programming language. Recall from our examination of the `System.Collections` namespace (see Chapter 7) that the `Stack` type can be used to push a value onto a stack as well as pop the topmost value off of the stack for use. Of course, CIL developers do not literally use an object of type `System.Collections.Stack` to load and unload the values to be evaluated; however, the same pushing and popping mind-set still applies.

Formally speaking, the entity used to hold a set of values is termed the *virtual execution stack*. As you will see, CIL provides a number of opcodes that are used to push a value onto the stack; this process is termed *loading*. As well, CIL defines a number of additional opcodes that transfer the topmost value on the stack into memory (such as a local variable) using a process termed *storing*.

In the world of CIL, it is impossible to access a point of data directly, including locally defined variables, incoming method arguments, or field data of a type. Rather, you are required to explicitly load the item onto the stack, only to then pop it off for later use (keep this point in mind, as it will help explain why a given block of CIL code can look a bit redundant).

To understand how CIL leverages a stack-based model, consider a simple C# method, `PrintMessage()`, which takes no arguments and returns nothing. Within the implementation of this method, you will simply print out the value of a local string variable to the standard output stream:

```
public void PrintMessage()
{
     string myMessage = "Hello.";
     Console.WriteLine(myMessage);
}
```

If you were to examine how the C# compiler translates this method in terms of CIL, you would first find that the `PrintMessage()` method defines a storage slot for a local variable using the `.locals` directive. The local string is then loaded and stored in this local variable using the `ldstr` (load string) and `stloc.0` opcodes (which can be read as "store the current value in a local variable at index zero").

The value (again, at index 0) is then loaded into memory using the `ldloc.0` ("load the local argument at index 0") opcode for use by the `System.Console.WriteLine()` method invocation (specified using the `call` opcode). Finally, the function returns via the `ret` opcode:

```
.method public hidebysig instance void PrintMessage() cil managed
{
    .maxstack  1
    // Define a local string variable (at index 0).
    .locals init ([0] string myMessage)
    // Load a string with the value "Hello."
    ldstr  " Hello."
    // Store string value on the stack in the local variable.
    stloc.0
    // Load the value at index 0.
    ldloc.0
    // Call method with current value.
    call  void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string)
    ret
}
```

■ **Note** As you can see, CIL supports code comments using the double-slash syntax (as well as the `/*...*/` syntax, for that matter). As in C#, code comments are completely ignored by the CIL compiler.

Understanding Round-trip Engineering

You are aware of how to use `ildasm.exe` to view the CIL code generated by the C# compiler. What you may not know, however, is that `ildasm.exe` allows you to dump the CIL contained within a loaded assembly to an external file. Once you have the CIL code at your disposal, you are free to edit and recompile the code base using the CIL compiler, `ilasm.exe`.

Formally speaking, this technique is termed *round-trip engineering*, and it can be useful under a number of circumstances:

- You need to modify an assembly for which you no longer have the source code.
- You are working with a less-than-perfect .NET language compiler that has emitted ineffective CIL code, and you wish to modify the code base.
- You are building COM interoperability assemblies and wish to account for some IDL attributes that have been lost during the conversion process (such as the COM `[helpstring]` attribute).

To illustrate the process of round-tripping, begin by creating a new C# code file (`HelloProgram.cs`) using a simple text editor, and define the following class type (you are free to use Visual Studio 2005 as well; however, be sure to delete the `AssemblyInfo.cs` file to decrease the amount of generated CIL code):

```
// A simple C# console app.
using System;

class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Hello CIL code!");
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Save your file to a convenient location and compile your program using `csc.exe`:

```
csc HelloProgram.cs
```

Now, open `HelloProgram.exe` with `ildasm.exe` and, using the File ➤ Dump menu option, save the raw CIL code to a new `*.il` file (`HelloProgram.il`) in a convenient location on your hard drive (the default values of the resulting dialog box are fine as is). Now you are able to view this file using your text editor of choice. Here is the (slightly reformatted and annotated) result:

```
// Referenced Assemblies.
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}

// Our assembly.
.assembly HelloProgram
{
  .hash algorithm 0x00008004
  .ver 0:0:0:0
}
.module HelloProgram.exe
.imagebase 0x00400000
.file alignment 0x00000200
```

```
.stackreserve 0x00100000
.subsystem 0x0003
.corflags 0x00000001

// Definition of Program class.
.class private auto ansi beforefieldinit Program
       extends [mscorlib]System.Object
{
  .method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
  {
    // Marks this method as the entry point of the
    // executable.
    .entrypoint
    .maxstack  8
    IL_0000:  nop
    IL_0001:  ldstr  "Hello CIL code!"
    IL_0006:  call void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string)
    IL_000b:  nop
    IL_000c:  call string [mscorlib]System.Console::ReadLine()
    IL_0011:  pop
    IL_0012:  ret
  }

  // The default constructor.
  .method public hidebysig specialname rtspecialname
          instance void  .ctor() cil managed
  {
    .maxstack  8
    IL_0000:  ldarg.0
    IL_0001:  call instance void [mscorlib]System.Object::.ctor()
    IL_0006:  ret
  }
}
```

First, notice that the `*.il` file opens by declaring each externally referenced assembly the current assembly is compiled against. Here, you can see a single `.assembly extern` token set for the always present `mscorlib.dll`. Of course, if your class library made use of types within other referenced assemblies, you would find additional `.assembly extern` directives.

Next, you find the formal definition of your `HelloProgram.exe` assembly, which has been assigned a default version of 0.0.0.0 (given that you did not specify a value using the `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute). The assembly is further described using various CIL directives (such as `.module`, `.imagebase`, and so forth).

After documenting the externally referenced assemblies and defining the current assembly, you find a definition of the `Program` type. Note that the `.class` directive has various attributes (many of which are optional) such as `extends`, which marks the base class of the type:

```
.class private auto ansi beforefieldinit Program
       extends [mscorlib]System.Object
{ ... }
```

The bulk of the CIL code implements the class's default constructor and the `Main()` method, both of which are defined (in part) with the `.method` directive. Once the members have been defined using the correct directives and attributes, they are implemented using various opcodes.

It is critical to understand that when interacting with .NET types (such as `System.Console`) in CIL, you will *always* need to use the type's fully qualified name. Furthermore, the type's fully qualified name must *always* be prefixed with the friendly name of the defining assembly (in square brackets). Consider the CIL implementation of `Main()`:

```
.method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
  {
    .entrypoint
    .maxstack  8
    IL_0000:  nop
    IL_0001:  ldstr  "Hello CIL code!"
    IL_0006:  call void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string)
    IL_000b:  nop
    IL_000c:  call string [mscorlib]System.Console::ReadLine()
    IL_0011:  pop
    IL_0012:  ret
  }
```

The implementation of the default constructor in terms of CIL code makes use of yet another "load-centric" instruction (`ldarg.0`). In this case, the value is loaded onto the stack as not a custom variable specified by us, but the current object reference (more details on this later). Also note that the default constructor explicitly makes a call to the base class constructor:

```
.method public hidebysig specialname rtspecialname
     instance void  .ctor() cil managed
{
     .maxstack  8
     IL_0000:  ldarg.0
     IL_0001:  call instance void [mscorlib]System.Object::.ctor()
     IL_0006:  ret
}
```

The Role of CIL Code Labels

One thing you certainly have noticed is that each line of implementation code is prefixed with a token of the form `IL_XXX:` (e.g., `IL_0000:`, `IL_0001:`, and so on). These tokens are called *code labels* and may be named in any manner you choose (provided they are not duplicated within the same scope). When you dump an assembly to file using `ildasm.exe`, it will automatically generate code labels that follow an `IL_XXX:` naming convention. However, you may change them to reflect a more descriptive marker:

```
.method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
    .entrypoint
    .maxstack  8
    Nothing_1:  nop
    Load_String:  ldstr  "Hello CIL code!"
    PrintToConsole: call void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string)
    Nothing_2:  nop
    WaitFor_KeyPress: call string [mscorlib]System.Console::ReadLine()
    RemoveValueFromStack:  pop
    Leave_Function:  ret
}
```

The truth of the matter is that most code labels are completely optional. The only time code labels are truly useful (and mandatory) is when you are authoring CIL code that makes use of various branching or looping constructs. Given this, you can remove these autogenerated labels altogether with no ill effect:

```
.method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
    .entrypoint
    .maxstack  8
```

```
    nop
    ldstr  "Hello CIL code!"
    call void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string)
    nop
    call string [mscorlib]System.Console::ReadLine()
    pop
    ret
}
```

Interacting with CIL: Modifying an *.il File

Now that you have a better understanding of how a basic CIL file is composed, let's complete our round-tripping experiment. The goal here is to update the CIL within the existing `*.il` file as so:

- Add a reference to the `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assembly.
- Load a local string within `Main()`.
- Call the `System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox.Show()` method using the local string variable as an argument.

The first step is to add a new `.assembly` directive (qualified with the `extern` attribute) that specifies you are using `System.Windows.Forms.dll`. To do so, simply update the `*.il` file with the following logic after the external reference to `mscorlib`:

```
.assembly extern System.Windows.Forms
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89)
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
```

Be aware that the value assigned to the `.ver` directive may differ depending on which version of the .NET platform you have installed on your development machine. Here, you see that `System.Windows.Forms.dll` version 2.0.0.0 is used and has the public key token of B77A5C561934E089. If you open the GAC (see Chapter 11) and locate your version of the `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assembly, you can simply copy the correct version and public key token value via the assembly's Properties page.

Next, you need to alter the current implementation of the `Main()` method. Locate this method within the `*.il` file and remove the current implementation code (the `.maxstack` and `.entrypoint` directives should remain intact; I'll describe them later):

```
.method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
    .entrypoint
    .maxstack  8
    // ToDo: Write new CIL code!
}
```

Again, the goal is to push a new string onto the stack and call the `MessageBox.Show()` method (rather than the `Console.WriteLine()` method). Recall that when you specify the name of an external type, you must make use of the type's fully qualified name (in conjunction with the friendly name of the assembly). Keeping this in mind, update the `Main()` method as follows:

```
.method private hidebysig static void  Main(string[] args) cil managed
{
    .entrypoint
    .maxstack  8
     ldstr  "CIL is way cool"
     call   valuetype [System.Windows.Forms]
               System.Windows.Forms.DialogResult
               [System.Windows.Forms]
               System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox::Show(string)
     pop
     ret
}
```

In effect, you have just updated the CIL code to correspond to the following C# class definition:

```
public class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox.Show("CIL is way cool");
     }
}
```

Compiling CIL Code Using ilasm.exe

Assuming you have saved this modified `*.il` file, you can compile a new .NET assembly using the `ilasm.exe` (CIL compiler) utility. Perhaps surprisingly, the CIL compiler has far fewer command-line flags than the C# compiler. Table 15-1 shows the core flags of interest.

Table 15-1. *Common* `ilasm.exe` *Command-Line Flags*

Flag	Meaning in Life
`/debug`	Includes debug information (such as local variable and argument names, as well as line numbers).
`/dll`	Produces a `*.dll` file as output.
`/exe`	Produces an `*.exe` file as output. This is the default setting and may be omitted.
`/key`	Compiles the assembly with a strong name using a given `*.snk` file.
`/noautoinherit`	Prevents class types from automatically inheriting from `System.Object` when a specific base class is not defined.
`/output`	Specifies the output file name and extension. If you do not make use of the `/output` flag, the resulting file name is the same as the name of the first source file.

To compile your updated `simplehelloclass.il` file into a .NET `*.exe`, you can issue the following command within a Visual Studio 2005 command prompt:

```
ilasm /exe HelloProgram.il
```

Assuming things have worked successfully, you will see the report shown in Figure 15-1.



Figure 15-1. *Compiling* `*.il` *files using* `ilasm.exe`

At this point, you can run your new application. Sure enough, rather than pumping a message to the Console window, you will now see a message box displaying your message (see Figure 15-2).



Figure 15-2. *The result of the round-trip*

Compiling CIL Code Using SharpDevelop

When working with `*.il` files, you may wish to make use of the freely available SharpDevelop IDE (see Chapter 2). When you create a new combine (via the File ➤ New Combine menu option), one of your choices is to create a CIL project workspace. While SharpDevelop does not have IntelliSense support for CIL projects, CIL tokens are color-coded, and you are able to compile and run your application directly within the IDE (rather than running `ilasm.exe` from a command prompt).

Compiling CIL Code Using ILIDE#

If you're truly interested in experimenting with the CIL programming language, I also recommend downloading the latest version of a free open source CIL editor named ILIDE#. This tool, like SharpDevelop, provides color-coding, `ilasm.exe` integration, and various related tools. Unlike SharpDevelop, the latest version of ILIDE# now supports CIL IntelliSense! You can download ILIDE# from `http://ilide.aspfreeserver.com/default-en.aspx` (of course, this URL is subject to change). Figure 15-3 shows ILIDE# in action.

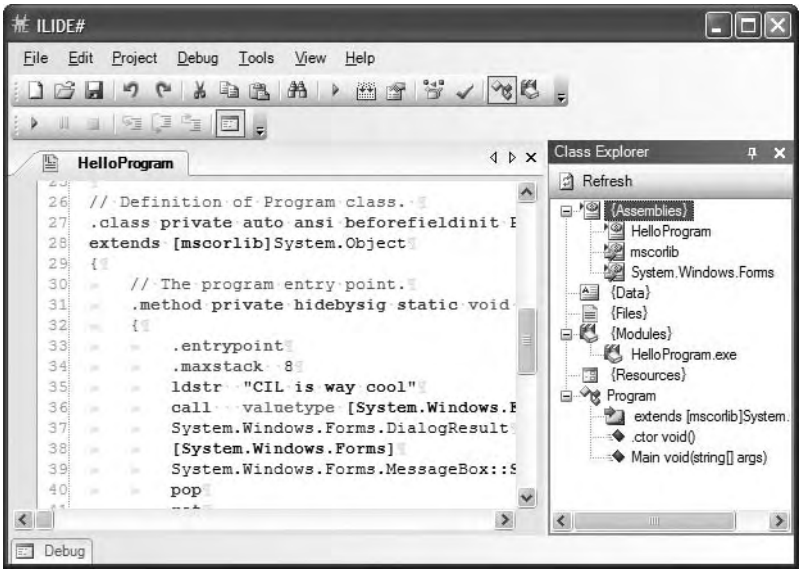


Figure 15-3. *ILIDE# is a free CIL IDE.*

The Role of peverify.exe

When you are building or modifying assemblies using CIL code, it is always advisable to verify that the compiled binary image is a well-formed .NET image using the `peverify.exe` command-line tool:

```
peverify HelloProgram.exe
```

This tool will examine all opcodes within the specified assembly for valid CIL code. For example, in terms of CIL code, the evaluation stack must always be empty before exiting a function. If you forget to pop off any remaining values, the `ilasm.exe` compiler will still generate a valid assembly (given that compilers are concerned only with *syntax*). `peverify.exe`, on the other hand, is concerned with *semantics*. If you did forget to clear the stack before exiting a given function, `peverify.exe` will let you know.

■ **Source Code** The `HelloProgram.il` file is included under the Chapter 15 subdirectory.

Understanding CIL Directives and Attributes

Now that you have seen how `ildasm.exe` and `ilasm.exe` can be used to perform a round-trip, we can get down to the business of checking out the syntax and semantics of CIL itself. The next sections will walk you through the process of authoring a custom namespace containing a set of types. However, to keep things simple, these types will not contain any implementation logic for their members. Once you understand how to create empty types, you can then turn your attention to the process of providing "real" members using CIL opcodes.

Specifying Externally Referenced Assemblies in CIL

Create a new file named `CilTypes.il` using your editor of choice. First, you need to list the set of external assemblies used by the current assembly. For this example, you will only make use of types found within `mscorlib.dll`. To do so, the `.assembly` directive will be qualified using the `external` attribute. When you are referencing a strongly named assembly, such as `mscorlib.dll`, you'll want to specify the `.publickeytoken` and `.ver` directives as well:

```
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
```

■ **Note** Strictly speaking, you are not required to explicitly reference `mscorlib.dll` as an external reference, as `ilasm.exe` will do so automatically.

Defining the Current Assembly in CIL

The next order of business is to define the assembly you are interested in building using the `.assembly` directive. At the simplest level, an assembly can be defined by specifying the friendly name of the binary:

```
// Our assembly.
.assembly CILTypes { }
```

While this indeed defines a new .NET assembly, you will typically place additional directives within the scope of the assembly declaration. For this example, update your assembly definition to include a version number of 1.0.0.0 using the `.ver` directive (note that each numerical identifier is separated by *colons*, not the C#-centric dot notation):

```
// Our assembly.
.assembly CILTypes
{
     .ver 1:0:0:0
}
```

Given that the CILTypes assembly is a single-file assembly, you will finish up the assembly definition using a single `.module` directive, which marks the official name of your .NET binary, `CILTypes.dll`:

```
.assembly CILTypes
{
     .ver 1:0:0:0
}
// The module of our single-file assembly.
.module CILTypes.dll
```

In addition to `.assembly` and `.module` are CIL directives that further qualify the overall structure of the .NET binary you are composing. Table 15-2 lists a few of the more common assembly-level directives.

Table 15-2. *Additional Assembly-Centric Directives*

Directive	Meaning in Life
`.mresources`	If your assembly makes use of internal resource (such as bitmaps or string tables), this directive is used to identify the name of the file that contains the resources to be embedded. Chapter 20 examines .NET resources in detail.
`.subsystem`	This CIL directive is used to establish the preferred UI that the assembly wishes to execute within. For example, a value of 2 signifies that the assembly should run within a Forms-based GUI, whereas a value of 3 denotes a console application.

Defining Namespaces in CIL

Now that you have defined the look and feel of your assembly (and the required external references), you can create a .NET namespace (`MyNamespace`) using the `.namespace` directive:

```
// Our assembly has a single namespace.
.namespace MyNamespace {}
```

Like C#, CIL namespace definitions can be nested within an outer namespace. For the sake of argument, assume you wish to create a root namespace named `IntertechTraining`:

```
.namespace IntertechTraining
{
     .namespace MyNamespace {}
}
```

Like C#, CIL allows you to define a nested namespace as so:

```
// Defining a nested namespace.
.namespace IntertechTraining.MyNamespace{}
```

Defining Class Types in CIL

Empty namespaces are not very interesting, so let's now check out the process of defining a class type using CIL. Not surprisingly, the `.class` directive is used to define a new class type. However, this simple directive can be adorned with numerous additional attributes, to further qualify the nature of the type. To illustrate, add a simple public class named `MyBaseClass`. As in C#, if you do not specify an explicit base class, your type will automatically be derived from `System.Object`:

```
.namespace MyNamespace
{
     // System.Object base class assumed.
     .class public MyBaseClass {}
}
```

When you are building a class type that derives from any class other than `System.Object`, you make use of the `extends` attribute. Whenever you need to reference a type defined within the same assembly, CIL demands that you also make use of the fully qualified name (however, if the base type is within the same assembly, you can omit the assembly's friendly name prefix). Therefore, the following attempt to extend `MyBaseClass` results in a compiler error:

```
// This will not compile!
.namespace MyNamespace
{
     .class public MyBaseClass {}
     .class public MyDerivedClass
          extends MyBaseClass {}
}
```

To correctly define the parent class of `MyDerivedClass`, you must specify the full name of `MyBaseClass` as so:

```
// Better!
.namespace MyNamespace
{
     .class public MyBaseClass {}
     .class public MyDerivedClass
          extends MyNamespace.MyBaseClass {}
}
```

In addition to the `public` and `extends` attributes, a CIL class definition may take numerous additional qualifiers that control the type's visibility, field layout, and so on. Table 15-3 illustrates some (but not all) of the attributes that may be used in conjunction with the `.class` directive.

Table 15-3. *Various Attributes Used in Conjunction with the* `.class` *Directive*

Attributes	Meaning in Life
`public`, `private`, `nested assembly`, `nested famandassem`, `nested family`, `nested famorassem`, `nested public`, `nested private`	CIL defines various attributes that are used to specify the visibility of a given type. As you can see, raw CIL offers numerous possibilities other than those offered by C#.
`abstract` `sealed`	These two attributes may be tacked onto a `.class` directive to define an abstract class or sealed class, respectively.

`auto`
`sequential`
`explicit`
	These attributes are used to instruct the CLR how to lay out field data in memory. For class types, the default layout flag (`auto`) is appropriate.

`extends` `implements`	These attributes allow you to define the base class of a type (via `extends`) or implement an interface on a type (via `implements`).

Defining and Implementing Interfaces in CIL

As odd as it may seem, interface types are defined in CIL using the `.class` directive. However, when the `.class` directive is adorned with the `interface` attribute, the type is realized as a CTS interface type. Once an interface has been defined, it may be bound to a class or structure type using the CIL `implements` attribute:

```
.namespace MyNamespace
{
     // An interface definition.
     .class public interface IMyInterface {}
     .class public MyBaseClass {}

     // DerivedTestClass now implements IAmAnInterface.
     .class public MyDerivedClass
          extends MyNamespace.MyBaseClass
          implements MyNamespace.IMyInterface {}
}
```

As you recall from Chapter 7, interfaces can function as the base interface to other interface types in order to build interface hierarchies. However, contrary to what you might be thinking, the `extends` attribute cannot be used to derive interface A from interface B. The `extends` attribute is used only to qualify a type's base class. When you wish to extend an interface, you will make use of the `implements` attribute yet again:

```
// Extending interfaces in terms of CIL.
.class public interface IMyInterface {}
.class public interface IMyOtherInterface
     implements MyNamespace.IMyInterface {}
```

Defining Structures in CIL

The `.class` directive can be used to define a CTS structure if the type extends `System.ValueType`. As well, the `.class` directive is qualified with the `sealed` attribute (given that structures can never be a base structure to other value types). If you attempt to do otherwise, `ilasm.exe` will issue a compiler error.

```
// A structure definition is always sealed.
.class public sealed MyStruct
     extends [mscorlib]System.ValueType{}
```

Do be aware that CIL provides a shorthand notation to define a structure type. If you use the `value` attribute, the new type will derive the type from `[mscorlib]System.ValueType` and be marked as sealed automatically. Therefore, you could define `MyStruct` as so:

```
// Shorthand notation for declaring a structure.
.class public value MyStruct{}
```

Defining Enums in CIL

.NET enumerations (as you recall) derive from `System.Enum`, which is a `System.ValueType` (and therefore must also be sealed). When you wish to define an enum in terms of CIL, simply extend `[mscorlib]System.Enum`:

```
// An enum.
.class public sealed MyEnum
     extends [mscorlib]System.Enum{}
```

Like a structure definition, enumerations can be defined with a shorthand notation using the `enum` attribute:

```
// Enum shorthand.
.class public enum MyEnum{}
```

■ **Note** The other fundamental .NET type, the delegate, also has a specific CIL representation. See Chapter 8 for full details.

Compiling the CILTypes.il file

Even though you have not yet added any members or implementation code to the types you have defined, you are able to compile this `*.il` file into a .NET DLL assembly (which you must do, as you have not specified a `Main()` method). Open up a command prompt and enter the following command to `ilasm.exe`:

```
ilasm /dll CilTypes.il
```

Once you have done so, you are able to open your binary into `ildasm.exe` (see Figure 15-4).

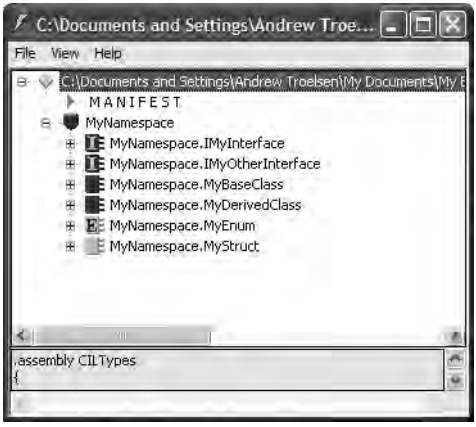


Figure 15-4. *The* `CILTypes.dll` *assembly*

Once you have confirmed the contents of your assembly, run `peverify.exe` against it. Notice that you are issued a number of errors, given that all your types are completely empty. To understand how to populate a type with content, you first need to examine the fundamental data types of CIL.

■ **Source Code** The `CilTypes.il` file is included under the Chapter 15 subdirectory.

.NET Base Class Library, C#, and CIL Data Type Mappings

Table 15-4 illustrates how a .NET base class type maps to the corresponding C# keyword, and how each C# keyword maps into raw CIL. As well, Table 15-4 documents the shorthand constant notations used for each CIL type. As you will see in just a moment, these constants are often referenced by numerous CIL opcodes.

Table 15-4. *Mapping .NET Base Class Types to C# Keywords, and C# Keywords to CIL*

.NET Base Class Type	C# Keyword	CIL Representation	CIL Constant Notation
`System.SByte`	`sbyte`	`int8`	`I1`
`System.Byte`	`byte`	`unsigned int8`	`U1`
`System.Int16`	`short`	`int16`	`I2`
`System.UInt16`	`ushort`	`unsigned int16`	`U2`
`System.Int32`	`int`	`int32`	`I4`
`System.UInt32`	`uint`	`unsigned int32`	`U4`
`System.Int64`	`long`	`int64`	`I8`
`System.UInt64`	`ulong`	`unsigned int64`	`U8`
`System.Char`	`char`	`char`	`CHAR`
`System.Single`	`float`	`float32`	`R4`
`System.Double`	`double`	`float64`	`R8`

.NET Base Class Type	C# Keyword	CIL Representation	CIL Constant Notation
System.Boolean	bool	bool	BOOLEAN
System.String	string	string	N/A
System.Object	object	object	N/A
System.Void	void	void	VOID

Defining Type Members in CIL

As you are already aware, .NET types may support various members. Enumerations have some set of name/value pairs. Structures and classes may have constructors, fields, methods, properties, static members, and so on. Over the course of this book's first 14 chapters, you have already seen partial CIL definitions for the items previously mentioned, but nevertheless, here is a quick recap of how various members map to CIL primitives.

Defining Field Data in CIL

Enumerations, structures, and classes can all support field data. In each case, the `.field` directive will be used. For example, let's breathe some life into the skeleton `MyEnum` enumeration and define three name/value pairs (note the values are specified using a parentheses syntax):

```
.class public auto ansi sealed MyEnum
     extends [mscorlib]System.Enum
{
     .field public static literal valuetype
          MyNamespace.MyEnum NameOne = int32(0)
     .field public static literal valuetype
          MyNamespace.MyEnum NameTwo = int32(1)
     .field public static literal valuetype
          MyNamespace.MyEnum NameThree = int32(2)
}
```

Fields that reside within the scope of a .NET `System.Enum`-derived type are qualified using the `static` and `literal` attributes. As you would guess, these attributes set up the field data to be a fixed value accessible from the type itself (e.g., `MyEnum.NameOne`).

■ **Note** The values assigned to an enum value may also be in hexadecimal.

Of course, when you wish to define a point of field data within a class or structure, you are not limited to a point of public static literal data. For example, you could update `MyBaseClass` to support two points of private, instance-level field data:

```
.class public MyBaseClass
{
     .field private string stringField
     .field private int32 intField
}
```

As in C#, class field data will automatically be assigned to the correct default value. If you wish to allow the object user to supply custom values at the time of creation for each of these points of private field data, you (of course) need to create custom constructors.

Defining Type Constructors in CIL

The CTS supports both instance-level and class-level (static) constructors. In terms of CIL, instance-level constructors are represented using the `.ctor` token, while a static-level constructor is expressed via `.cctor` (class constructor). Both of these CIL tokens must be qualified using the `rtspecialname` (return type special name) and `specialname` attributes. Simply put, these attributes are used to identify a specific CIL token that can be treated in unique ways by a given .NET language. For example, in C#, constructors do not define a return type; however, in terms of CIL, the return value of a constructor is indeed `void`:

```
.class public MyBaseClass
{
     .field private string stringField
     .field private int32 intField

     .method public hidebysig specialname rtspecialname
       instance void .ctor(string s, int32 i) cil managed
     {
          // TODO: Add implementation code...
     }
}
```

Note that the `.ctor` directive has been qualified with the `instance` attribute (as it is not a static constructor). The `cil managed` attributes denote that the scope of this method contains CIL code, rather than unmanaged code, which may be used during platform invocation requests.

Defining Properties in CIL

Properties and methods also have specific CIL representations. By way of an example, if `MyBaseClass` were updated to support a public property named `TheString`, you would author the following CIL (note again the use of the `specialname` attribute):

```
.class public MyBaseClass
{
...
     .method public hidebysig specialname
          instance string  get_TheString() cil managed
     {
          // TODO: Add implementation code...
     }

     .method public hidebysig specialname
          instance void  set_TheString(string 'value') cil managed
     {
          // TODO: Add implementation code...
     }

     .property instance string TheString()
     {
          .get instance string
               MyNamespace.MyBaseClass::get_TheString()
          .set instance void
               MyNamespace. MyBaseClass::set_TheString(string)
     }
}
```

Recall that in terms of CIL, a property maps to a pair of methods that take `get_` and `set_` prefixes. The `.property` directive makes use of the related `.get` and `.set` directives to map property syntax to the correct "specially named" methods.

■ **Note** The previous property definitions will fail to compile, given that you have not yet implemented the mutator logic.

Defining Member Parameters

Now assume that you wish to define methods that take some number of arguments. In a nutshell, specifying arguments in CIL is (more or less) identical to doing so in C#. For example, each argument is defined by specifying its data type followed by the parameter name. Furthermore, like C#, CIL provides a way to define input, output, and pass-by-reference parameters. As well, CIL allows you to define a parameter array argument (aka the C# `params` keyword) as well as optional parameters (which are not supported in C#, but are used in VB .NET).

To illustrate the process of defining parameters in raw CIL, assume you wish to build a method that takes an `int32` (by value), `int32` (by reference), a `[mscorlib]System.Collection.ArrayList`, and a single output parameter (of type `int32`). In terms of C#, this method would look something like the following:

```
public static void MyMethod(int inputInt,
     ref int refInt, ArrayList ar, out int outputInt)
{
     outputInt = 0;  // Just to satisfy the C# compiler...
}
```

If you were to map this method into CIL terms, you would find that C# reference parameters are marked with an ampersand (&) suffixed to the parameter's underlying data type (`int32&`). Output parameters also make use of the & suffix, but they are further qualified using the CIL `[out]` token. Also notice that if the parameter is a reference type (in this case, the `[mscorlib]System.Collections.ArrayList` type), the `class` token is prefixed to the data type (not to be confused with the `.class` directive!):

```
.method public hidebysig static void  MyMethod(int32 inputInt,
    int32& refInt,
    class [mscorlib]System.Collections.ArrayList ar,
    [out] int32& outputInt) cil managed
{
...
}
```

Examining CIL Opcodes

The final aspect of CIL code you'll examine in this chapter has to do with the role of various operational codes (opcodes). Recall that an opcode is simply a CIL token used to build the implementation logic for a given member. The complete set of CIL opcodes (which is fairly large) can be grouped into the following broad categories:

- Opcodes that control program flow
- Opcodes that evaluate expressions
- Opcodes that access values in memory (via parameters, local variables, etc.)

To provide some insight to the world of member implementation via CIL, Table 15-5 defines some of the more useful opcodes that are directly related to member implementation logic, grouped by related functionality.

Table 15-5. *Various Implementation-Specific CIL Opcodes*

Opcodes	Meaning in Life
`add`, `sub`, `mul`, `div`, `rem`	These CIL opcodes allow you to add, subtract, multiply, and divide two values (`rem` returns the remainder of a division operation).
`and`, `or`, `not`, `xor`	These CIL opcodes allow you to perform binary operations on two values.
`ceq`, `cgt`, `clt`	These CIL opcodes allow you to compare two values on the stack in various manners, for example: `ceq`: Compare for equality `cgt`: Compare for greater than `clt`: Compare for less than
`box`, `unbox`	These CIL opcodes are used to convert between reference types and value types.
`ret`	This CIL opcode is used to exit a method and return a value to the caller (if necessary).
`beq`, `bgt`, `ble`, `blt`, `switch`	These CIL opcodes (in addition to many other related opcodes) are used to control branching logic within a method, for example: `beq`: Break to code label if equal `bgt`: Break to code label if greater than `ble`: Break to code label if less than or equal to `blt`: Break to code label if less than All of the branch-centric opcodes require that you specify a CIL code label to jump to if the result of the test is true.
`call`	This CIL opcode is used to call a member on a given type.
`newarr`, `newobj`	These CIL opcodes allow you to allocate a new array or new object type into memory (respectively).

The next broad category of CIL opcodes (a subset of which is shown in Table 15-6) are used to load (push) arguments onto the virtual execution stack. Note how these load-specific opcodes take an `ld` (load) prefix.

Table 15-6. *The Primary Stack-Centric Opcodes of CIL*

Opcode	Meaning in Life
`ldarg` (with numerous variations)	Loads a method's argument onto the stack. In addition to the generic `ldarg` (which works in conjunction with a given index that identifies the argument), there are numerous other variations. For example, `ldarg` opcodes that have a numerical suffix (`ldarg_0`) hard-code which argument to load. As well, variations of the `ldarg` opcode allow you to hard-code the data type using the CIL constant notation shown in Table 15-4 (`ldarg_I4`, for an `int32`) as well as the data type and value (`ldarg_I4_5`, to load an `int32` with the value of 5).
`ldc` (with numerous variations)	Loads a constant value onto the stack.
`ldfld` (with numerous variations)	Loads the value of an instance-level field onto the stack.
`ldloc` (with numerous variations)	Loads the value of a local variable onto the stack.

Opcode	Meaning in Life
ldobj	Obtains all the values gathered by a heap-based object and places them on the stack.
ldstr	Loads a string value onto the stack.

In addition to the set of load-specific opcodes, CIL provides numerous opcodes that *explicitly* pop the topmost value off the stack. As shown over the first few examples in this chapter, popping a value off the stack typically involves storing the value into temporary local storage for further use (such as a parameter for an upcoming method invocation). Given this, note how many opcodes that pop the current value off the virtual execution stack take an st (store) prefix. Table 15-7 hits the highlights.

Table 15-7. *Various Pop-Centric Opcodes*

Opcode	Meaning in Life
pop	Removes the value currently on top of the evaluation stack, but does not bother to store the value
starg	Stores the value on top of the stack into the method argument at a specified index
stloc (with numerous variations)	Pops the current value from the top of the evaluation stack and stores it in a local variable list at a specified index
stobj	Copies a value of a specified type from the evaluation stack into a supplied memory address
stsfld	Replaces the value of a static field with a value from the evaluation stack

Do be aware that various CIL opcodes will *implicitly* pop values off the stack to perform the task at hand. For example, if you are attempting to subtract two numbers using the sub opcode, it should be clear that sub will have to pop off the next two available values before it can perform the calculation. Once the calculation is complete, the result of the value (surprise, surprise) is pushed onto the stack once again.

Considering the .maxstack Directive

When you write method implementations using raw CIL, you need to be mindful of a special directive named .maxstack. As its name suggests, .maxstack establishes the maximum number of variables that may be pushed onto the stack at any given time during the execution of the method. The good news is that the .maxstack directive has a default value (8), which should be safe for a vast majority of methods you may be authoring. However, if you wish to be very explicit, you are able to manually calculate the number of local variables on the stack and define this value explicitly:

```
.method public hidebysig instance void
     Speak() cil managed
{
     // During the scope of this method, exactly
     // 1 value (the string literal) is on the stack.
     .maxstack  1
     ldstr "Hello there..."
     call void [mscorlib]System.Console::WriteLine(string)
     ret
}
```

Declaring Local Variables in CIL

Let's first check out how to declare a local variable. Assume you wish to build a method in CIL named `MyLocalVariables()` that takes no arguments and returns `void`. Within the method, you wish to define three local variables of type `System.String`, `System.Int32`, and `System.Object`. In C#, this member would appear as so (recall that locally scoped variables do not receive a default value and should be set to an initial state before further use):

```
public static void MyLocalVariables()
{
    string myStr = "CIL me dude...";
    int myInt = 33;
    object myObj = new object();
}
```

If you were to construct `MyLocalVariables()` directly in CIL, you could author the following:

```
.method public hidebysig static void
    MyLocalVariables() cil managed
{
    .maxstack  8
    // Define three local variables.
    .locals init ([0] string myStr, [1] int32 myInt, [2] object myObj)

    // Load a string onto the virtual execution stack.
    ldstr "CIL me dude..."
    // Pop off current value and store in local variable [0].
    stloc.0

    // Load a constant of type 'i4'
    // (shorthand for int32) set to the value 33.
    ldc.i4 33
    // Pop off current value and store in local variable [1].
    stloc.1

    // Create a new object and place on stack.
    newobj     instance void [mscorlib]System.Object::.ctor()
    // Pop off current value and store in local variable [2].
    stloc.2
    ret
}
```

As you can see, the first step taken to allocate local variables in raw CIL is to make use of the `.locals` directive, which is paired with the `init` attribute. Within the scope of the related parentheses, your goal is to associate a given numerical index to each variable (seen here as `[0]`, `[1]`, and `[2]`). As you can see, each index is identified by its data type and an optional variable name. Once the local variables have been defined, you load a value onto the stack (using the various load-centric opcodes) and store the value within the local variable (using the various storage-centric opcodes).

Mapping Parameters to Local Variables in CIL

You have already seen how to declare local variables in raw CIL using the `.local` init directive; however, you have yet to see exactly how to map incoming parameters to local methods. Consider the following static C# method:

```
public static int Add(int a, int b)
{
     return a + b;
}
```

This innocent-looking method has a lot to say in terms of CIL. First, the incoming arguments (a and b) must be pushed onto the virtual execution stack using the ldarg (load argument) opcode. Next, the add opcode will be used to pop the next two values off the stack and find the summation, and store the value on the stack yet again. Finally, this sum is popped off the stack and returned to the caller via the ret opcode. If you were to disassemble this C# method using ildasm.exe, you would find numerous additional tokens injected by csc.exe, but the crux of the CIL code is quite simple:

```
.method public hidebysig static int32  Add(int32 a,
     int32 b) cil managed
{
  .maxstack  2
  ldarg.0    // Load 'a' onto the stack.
  ldarg.1    // Load 'b' onto the stack.
  add        // Add both values.
  ret
}
```

The Hidden this Reference

Notice that the two incoming arguments (a and b) are referenced within the CIL code using their indexed position (index 0 and index 1), given that the virtual execution stack begins indexing at position 0.

One thing to be very mindful of when you are examining or authoring raw CIL code is that every (nonstatic) method that takes incoming arguments automatically receives an implicit additional parameter, which is a reference to the current object (think the C# this keyword). Given this, if the Add() method were defined as *non*static

```
// No longer static!
public int Add(int a, int b)
{
     return a + b;
}
```

the incoming a and b arguments are loaded using ldarg.1 and ldarg.2 (rather than the expected ldarg.0 and ldarg.1 opcodes). Again, the reason is that slot 0 actually contains the implicit this reference. Consider the following pseudo-code:

```
// This is JUST pseudo-code!
.method public hidebysig static int32  AddTwoIntParams(
     MyClass_HiddenThisPointer this, int32 a, int32 b) cil managed
{
  ldarg.0   // Load MyClass_HiddenThisPointer onto the stack.
  ldarg.1   // Load 'a' onto the stack.
  ldarg.2   // Load 'b' onto the stack.
...
}
```

Representing Iteration Constructs in CIL

Iteration constructs in the C# programming language are represented using the for, foreach, while, and do keywords, each of which has a specific representation in CIL. Consider the classic for loop:

```
public static void CountToTen()
{
     for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
         ;
}
```

Now, as you may recall, the `br` opcodes (`br`, `blt`, and so on) are used to control a break in flow when some condition has been met. In this example, you have set up a condition in which the `for` loop should break out of its cycle when the local variable `i` is equal to the value of 10. With each pass, the value of 1 is added to `i`, at which point the test condition is yet again evaluated.

Also recall that when you make use of any of the CIL branching opcodes, you will need to define a specific code label (or two) that marks the location to jump to when the condition is indeed true. Given these points, ponder the following (augmented) CIL code generated via `ildasm.exe` (including the autogenerated code labels):

```
.method public hidebysig static void  CountToTen() cil managed
{
  .maxstack  2
  .locals init ([0] int32 i)  // Init the local integer 'i'.
  IL_0000:  ldc.i4.0          // Load this value onto the stack.
  IL_0001:  stloc.0           // Store this value at index '0'.
  IL_0002:  br.s IL_0008     // Jump to IL_0008.
  IL_0004:  ldloc.0           // Load value of variable at index 0.
  IL_0005:  ldc.i4.1          // Load the value '1' on the stack.
  IL_0006:  add               // Add current value on the stack at index 0.
  IL_0007:  stloc.0
  IL_0008:  ldloc.0           // Load value at index '0'.
  IL_0009:  ldc.i4.s   10     // Load value of '10' onto the stack.
  IL_000b:  blt.s IL_0004    // Less than?  If so, jump back to IL_0004
  IL_000d:  ret
}
```

In a nutshell, this CIL code begins by defining the local `int32` and loading it onto the stack. At this point, you jump back and forth between code label `IL_0008` and `IL_0004`, each time bumping the value of `i` by 1 and testing to see whether `i` is still less than the value 10. If so, you exit the method.

Building a .NET Assembly with CIL

Now that you've taken a tour of the syntax and semantics of raw CIL, it's time to solidify your current understanding by building a .NET application using nothing but CIL and your text editor of choice. Specifically, your application will consist of a privately deployed, single-file `*.dll` that contains two class type definitions, and a console-based `*.exe` that interacts with these types.

Building CILCars.dll

The first order of business is to build the `*.dll` to be consumed by the client. Open a text editor and create a new `*.il` file named `CILCars.il`. This single-file assembly will make use of two external .NET binaries, and you can begin creating your CIL code file as so:

```
// Reference mscorlib.dll and
// System.Windows.Forms.dll
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
.assembly extern System.Windows.Forms
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
```

```
// Define the single-file assembly.
.assembly CILCars
{
  .hash algorithm 0x00008004
  .ver 1:0:0:0
}
.module CILCars.dll
```

As mentioned, this assembly will contain two class types. The first type, `CILCar`, defines two points of field data and a custom constructor. The second type, `CarInfoHelper`, defines a single static method named `DisplayCarInfo()`, which takes `CILCar` as a parameter and returns `void`. Both types are in the `CILCars` namespace. In terms of CIL, `CILCar` can be implemented as so:

```
// Implementation of CILCars.CILCar type.
.namespace CILCars
{
  .class public auto ansi beforefieldinit CILCar
       extends [mscorlib]System.Object
  {
    // The field data of the CILCar.
    .field public string petName
    .field public int32 currSpeed

    // The custom constructor simply allows the caller
    // to assign the field data.
    .method public hidebysig specialname rtspecialname
        instance void  .ctor(int32 c, string p) cil managed
    {
      .maxstack  8

      // Load first arg onto the stack and call base class ctor.
      ldarg.0  // 'this' object, not the int32!
      call instance void [mscorlib]System.Object::.ctor()

      // Now load first and second args onto the stack.
      ldarg.0  // 'this' object
      ldarg.1  // int32 arg

      // Store topmost stack (int 32) member in currSpeed field.
      stfld int32 CILCars.CILCar::currSpeed

      // Load string arg and store in petName field.
      ldarg.0  // 'this' object
      ldarg.2  // string arg
      stfld string CILCars.CILCar::petName
      ret
    }
   }
  }
```

Keeping in mind that the real first argument for any nonstatic member is the current object reference, the first block of CIL simply loads the object reference and calls the base class constructor. Next, you push the incoming constructor arguments onto the stack and store them into the type's field data using the `stfld` (store in field) opcode.

Next, you need to implement the second type in this namespace: `CILCarInfo`. The meat of the type is found within the static `Display()` method. In a nutshell, the role of this method is to take the incoming `CILCar` parameter, extract the values of its field data, and display it in a Windows Forms message box. Here is the complete implementation of `CILCarInfo`, with analysis to follow:

```
.class public auto ansi beforefieldinit CILCarInfo
        extends [mscorlib]System.Object
{
    .method public hidebysig static void
         Display(class CILCars.CILCar c) cil managed
    {
      .maxstack  8

      // We need a local string variable.
      .locals init ([0] string caption)

      // Load string and the incoming CILCar onto the stack.
      ldstr      "{0}'s speed is:"
      ldarg.0

      // Now place the value of the CILCar's petName on the
      // stack and call the static String.Format() method.
      ldfld      string CILCars.CILCar::petName
      call       string [mscorlib]System.String::Format(string, object)
      stloc.0

      // Now load the value of the currSpeed field and get its string
      // representation (note call to ToString() ).
      ldarg.0
      ldflda     int32 CILCars.CILCar::currSpeed
      call       instance string [mscorlib]System.Int32::ToString()
      ldloc.0

      // Now call the MessageBox.Show() method with loaded values.
      call       valuetype [System.Windows.Forms]
                   System.Windows.Forms.DialogResult
                   [System.Windows.Forms]
                   System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox::Show(string, string)
      pop
      ret
    }
  }
```

Although the amount of CIL code is a bit more than you see in the implementation of `CILCar`, things are still rather straightforward. First, given that you are defining a static method, you don't have to be concerned with the hidden object reference (thus, the `ldarg.0` opcode really does load the incoming `CILCar` argument).

The method begins by loading a string (`"{0}'s speed is"`) onto the stack, followed by the `CILCar` argument. Once these two values are in place, you load the value of the `petName` field and call the static `System.String.Format()` method to substitute the curly bracket placeholder with the `CILCar`'s pet name.

The same general procedure takes place when processing the `currSpeed` field, but note that you use the `ldarga` opcode, which loads the argument address onto the stack. At this point, you call `System.Int32.ToString()` to transform the value at said address into a string type. Finally, once both strings have been formatted as necessary, you call the `MessageBox.Show()` method.

At this point, you are able to compile your new `*.dll` using `ilasm.exe` with the following command:

```
ilasm /dll CILCars.il
```

and verify the contained CIL using `peverify.exe`:

```
peverify CILCars.dll
```

Building CILCarClient.exe

Now you can build a simple *.exe assembly that will

- Make a CILCar type.
- Pass the type into the static CILCarInfo.Display() method.

Create a new *.il file and define external references to mscorlib.dll and CILCars.dll (don't forget to place a copy of this .NET assembly in the client's application directory!). Next, define a single type (Program) that manipulates the CILCars.dll assembly. Here's the complete code:

```
// External assembly refs.
.assembly extern mscorlib
{
  .publickeytoken = (B7 7A 5C 56 19 34 E0 89 )
  .ver 2:0:0:0
}
.assembly extern CILCars
{
  .ver 1:0:0:0
}

// Our executable assembly.
.assembly CILCarClient
{
  .hash algorithm 0x00008004
  .ver 0:0:0:0
}
.module CILCarClient.exe

// Implementation of Program type
.namespace CILCarClient
{
  .class private auto ansi beforefieldinit Program
  extends [mscorlib]System.Object
  {
    .method private hidebysig static void
    Main(string[] args) cil managed
    {
      // Marks the entry point of the *.exe.
      .entrypoint
      .maxstack  8

      // Declare a local CILCar type and push
      // values on the stack for ctor call.
      .locals init ([0] class
      [CILCars]CILCars.CILCar myCilCar)
      ldc.i4 55
      ldstr "Junior"

      // Make new CilCar; store and load reference.
      newobj instance void
        [CILCars]CILCars.CILCar::.ctor(int32, string)
      stloc.0
      ldloc.0
```

```
      // Call Display() and pass in topmost value on stack.
      call void [CILCars]
         CILCars.CILCarInfo::Display(
             class [CILCars]CILCars.CILCar)
      ret
    }
  }
}
```

The one opcode that is important to point out is `.entrypoint`. Recall from the discussion earlier in this chapter that this opcode is used to mark which method of an `*.exe` functions as the entry point of the module. In fact, given that `.entrypoint` is how the CLR identifies the initial method to execute, this method can be called anything at all *other* than `Main()`. The remainder of the CIL code found in the `Main()` method is your basic pushing and popping of stack-based values.

Do note, however, that the creation of `CILCar` involves the use of the `.newobj` opcode. On a related note, recall that when you wish to invoke a member of a type using raw CIL, you make use of the double-colon syntax and, as always, make use of the fully qualified name of the type. With this, you can compile your new file with `ilasm.exe`, verify your assembly with `peverify.exe`, and execute your program:

```
ilasm CilCarClient.il
peverify CilCarClient.exe
CilCarClient.exe
```

Figure 15-5 shows the end result.



Figure 15-4. *Your* `CILCar` *in action*

That wraps up the CIL primer and the first goal of this chapter. At this point, I hope you feel confident that you can open a particular .NET assembly using `ildasm.exe` and gain a better understanding of what exactly is occurring behind the scenes.

Understanding Dynamic Assemblies

As you may have gathered, the process of building a complex .NET application in CIL would be quite the labor of love. On the one hand, CIL is an extremely expressive programming language that allows you to interact with all of the programming constructs allowed by the CTS. On the other hand, authoring raw CIL is tedious, error-prone, and painful. While it is true that knowledge is power, you may indeed wonder just how important it is to commit the laws of CIL syntax to memory. The answer is, "It depends." To be sure, most of your .NET programming endeavors will not require you to view, edit, or author raw CIL code. However, with the CIL primer behind you, you are now ready investigate the world of dynamic assemblies (as opposed to static assemblies) and the role of the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace.

The first question you may have is, "What exactly is the difference between static and dynamic assemblies?" By definition, *static assemblies* are .NET binaries loaded directly from disk storage, meaning they are located somewhere on your hard drive in a physical file (or possibly a set of files in the case of a multifile assembly) at the time the CLR requests them. As you might guess, every time you compile your C# source code, you end up with a static assembly.

A *dynamic assembly*, on the other hand, is created in memory on the fly using the types provided by the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace. The `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace makes it possible to create an assembly and its modules, type definitions, and CIL implementation logic at *runtime*. Once you have done so, you are then free to save your in-memory binary to disk. This, of course, results in a new static assembly. To be sure, the process of building a dynamic assembly using the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace does require some level of understanding regarding the nature of CIL opcodes.

Although creating dynamic assemblies is a fairly advanced (and uncommon) programming task, they can be useful under various circumstances:

- You are building a .NET programming tool that needs to generate assemblies on demand based on user input.
- You are building a program that needs to generate proxies to remote types on the fly based on the obtained metadata.
- You wish to load a static assembly and dynamically insert new types into the binary image.

This being said, let's check out the types within `System.Reflection.Emit`.

Exploring the System.Reflection.Emit Namespace

Creating a dynamic assembly requires you to have some familiarity with CIL opcodes, but the types of the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace hide the complexity of CIL as much as possible. For example, rather than directly specifying the necessary CIL directives and attributes to define a class type, you can simply make use of the `TypeBuilder` class. Likewise, if you wish to define a new instance-level constructor, you have no need to emit the `specialname`, `rtspecialname`, or `.ctor` tokens; rather, you can make use of the `ConstructorBuilder`. Table 15-8 documents the key members of the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace.

Table 15-8. *Select Members of the* `System.Reflection.Emit` *Namespace*

Members	Meaning in Life
`AssemblyBuilder`	Used to create an assembly (`*.dll` or `*.exe`) at runtime. `*.exes` must call the `ModuleBuilder.SetEntryPoint()` method to set the method that is the entry point to the module. If no entry point is specified, a `*.dll` will be generated.
`ModuleBuilder`	Used to define the set of modules within the current assembly.
`EnumBuilder`	Used to create a .NET enumeration type.
`TypeBuilder`	May be used to create classes, interfaces, structures, and delegates within a module at runtime.

`MethodBuilder`
`EventBuilder`
`LocalBuilder`
`PropertyBuilder`
`FieldBuilder`
`ConstructorBuilder`
`CustomAttributeBuilder`
`ParameterBuilder`
	Used to create type members (such as methods, local variables, properties, constructors, and attributes) at runtime.

`ILGenerator`	Emits CIL opcodes into a given type member.
`OpCodes`	Provides numerous fields that map to CIL opcodes. This type is used in conjunction with the various members of `System.Reflection.Emit.ILGenerator`.

In general, the types of the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace allow you represent raw CIL tokens programmatically during the construction of your dynamic binary. You will see many of these members in the example that follows; however, the `ILGenerator` type is worth checking out straightaway.

The Role of the System.Reflection.Emit.ILGenerator

As its name implies, the `ILGenerator` type's role is to inject CIL opcodes into a given type member. Typically, you will not need to directly create `ILGenerator` objects, but rather receive a valid reference to the `ILGenerator` type using the builder-centric types (such as the `MethodBuilder` and `ConstructorBuilder` types), for example:

```
// Obtain an ILGenerator from a ConstructorBuilder
// object named 'myCtorBuilder'.
ConstructorBuilder myCtorBuilder =
  new ConstructorBuilder(/* ...various args... */);
ILGenerator myCILGen = myCtorBuilder.GetILGenerator();
```

Once you have an `ILGenerator` in your hands, you are then able to emit the raw CIL opcodes using any number of methods. Table 15-9 documents some (but not all) methods of `ILGenerator`.

Table 15-9. *Select Methods of* `ILGenerator`

Method	Meaning in Life
`BeginCatchBlock()`	Begins a `catch` block
`BeginExceptionBlock()`	Begins an exception block for a nonfiltered exception
`BeginFinallyBlock()`	Begins a `finally` block
`BeginScope()`	Begins a lexical scope
`DeclareLocal()`	Declares a local variable
`DefineLabel()`	Declares a new label
`Emit()`	Is overloaded numerous times to allow you to emit CIL opcodes
`EmitCall()`	Pushes a `call` or `callvirt` opcode into the CIL stream
`EmitWriteLine()`	Emits a call to `Console.WriteLine()` with different types of values
`EndExceptionBlock()`	Ends an exception block
`EndScope()`	Ends a lexical scope
`ThrowException()`	Emits an instruction to throw an exception
`UsingNamespace()`	Specifies the namespace to be used in evaluating locals and watches for the current active lexical scope

The key method of `ILGenerator` is `Emit()`, which works in conjunction with the `System.Reflection.Emit.OpCodes` class type. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this type exposes a good number of read-only fields that map to raw CIL opcodes. The full set of these members are all documented within online help, and you will see various examples in the pages that follow.

Emitting a Dynamic Assembly

To illustrate the process of defining a .NET assembly at runtime, let's walk through the process of creating a single-file dynamic assembly named `MyAssembly.dll`. Within this module is a class named `HelloWorld`. The `HelloWorld` type supports a default constructor and a custom constructor that is used to assign the value of a private member variable (`theMessage`) of type `string`. In addition,

HelloWorld supports a public instance method named SayHello(), which prints a greeting to the standard I/O stream, and another instance method named GetMsg(), which returns the internal private string. In effect, you are going to programmatically generate the following class type:

```
// This class will be created at runtime
// using System.Reflection.Emit.
public class HelloWorld
{
     private string theMessage;
     HelloWorld() {}
     HelloWorld(string s) {  theMessage = s;}
     public string GetMsg() {  return theMessage;}
     public void SayHello()
     {
        System.Console.WriteLine("Hello from the HelloWorld class!");
     }
}
```

Assume you have created a new Visual Studio 2005 console application project workspace named DynAsmBuilder. Rename your initial class as MyAsmBuilder and define a static method named CreateMyAsm(). This single method is in charge of the following:

- Defining the characteristics of the dynamic assembly (name, version, etc.)
- Implementing the HelloClass type
- Saving the in-memory assembly to a physical file

Also note that the CreateMyAsm() method takes as a single parameter a System.AppDomain type, which will be used to obtain access to the AssemblyBuilder type associated with the current application domain (see Chapter 13 for a discussion of .NET application domains). Here is the complete code, with analysis to follow:

```
// The caller sends in an AppDomain type.
public static void CreateMyAsm(AppDomain curAppDomain)
{
     // Establish general assembly characteristics.
     AssemblyName assemblyName = new AssemblyName();
     assemblyName.Name = "MyAssembly";
     assemblyName.Version = new Version("1.0.0.0");

     // Create new assembly within the current AppDomain.
     AssemblyBuilder assembly =
          curAppDomain.DefineDynamicAssembly(assemblyName,
          AssemblyBuilderAccess.Save);

     // Given that we are building a single-file
     // assembly, the name of the module is the same as the assembly.
     ModuleBuilder module =
          assembly.DefineDynamicModule("MyAssembly", "MyAssembly.dll");

     // Define a public class named "HelloWorld".
     TypeBuilder helloWorldClass = module.DefineType("MyAssembly.HelloWorld",
          TypeAttributes.Public);

     // Define a private String member variable named "theMessage".
     FieldBuilder msgField =
          helloWorldClass.DefineField("theMessage", Type.GetType("System.String"),
          FieldAttributes.Private);
```

```
    // Create the custom ctor.
    Type[] constructorArgs = new Type[1];
    constructorArgs[0] = typeof(string);
    ConstructorBuilder constructor =
        helloWorldClass.DefineConstructor(MethodAttributes.Public,
        CallingConventions.Standard,
        constructorArgs);
    ILGenerator constructorIL = constructor.GetILGenerator();
    constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_0);
    Type objectClass = typeof(object);
    ConstructorInfo superConstructor =
        objectClass.GetConstructor(new Type[0]);
    constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Call, superConstructor);
    constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_0);
    constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_1);
    constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Stfld, msgField);
    constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ret);

    // Create the default ctor.
    helloWorldClass.DefineDefaultConstructor(MethodAttributes.Public);

    // Now create the GetMsg() method.
    MethodBuilder getMsgMethod =
        helloWorldClass.DefineMethod("GetMsg", MethodAttributes.Public,
        typeof(string), null);
    ILGenerator methodIL = getMsgMethod.GetILGenerator();
    methodIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_0);
    methodIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldfld, msgField);
    methodIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ret);

    // Create the SayHello method.
    MethodBuilder sayHiMethod =
        helloWorldClass.DefineMethod("SayHello",
        MethodAttributes.Public, null, null);
    methodIL = sayHiMethod.GetILGenerator();
    methodIL.EmitWriteLine("Hello from the HelloWorld class!");
    methodIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ret);

    // 'Bake' the class HelloWorld.
    // (Baking is the formal term for emitting the type)
    helloWorldClass.CreateType();

    // (Optionally) save the assembly to file.
    assembly.Save("MyAssembly.dll");
}
```

Emitting the Assembly and Module Set

The method body begins by establishing the minimal set of characteristics about your assembly, using the `AssemblyName` and `Version` types (defined in the `System.Reflection` namespace). Next, you obtain an `AssemblyBuilder` type via the instance-level `AppDomain.DefineDynamicAssembly()` method (recall the caller will pass in an `AppDomain` reference into the `CreateMyAsm()` method):

```
// Establish general assembly characteristics.
// and gain access to the AssemblyBuilder type
public static void CreateMyAsm(AppDomain curAppDomain)
{
     AssemblyName assemblyName = new AssemblyName();
     assemblyName.Name = "MyAssembly";
     assemblyName.Version = new Version("1.0.0.0");

     // Create new assembly within the current AppDomain.
     AssemblyBuilder assembly =
          curAppDomain.DefineDynamicAssembly(assemblyName,
               AssemblyBuilderAccess.Save);
...
}
```

As you can see, when calling `AppDomain.DefineDynamicAssembly()`, you must specify the access mode of the assembly you wish to define, which can be any of the values shown in Table 15-10.

Table 15-10. *Values of the* `AssemblyBuilderAccess` *Enumeration*

Value	Meaning in Life
`ReflectionOnly`	Represents that a dynamic assembly that can only be reflected over
`Run`	Represents that a dynamic assembly can be executed in memory but not saved to disk
`RunAndSave`	Represents that a dynamic assembly can be executed in memory and saved to disk
`Save`	Represents that a dynamic assembly can be saved to disk but not executed in memory

The next task is to define the module set for your new assembly. Given that the assembly is a single file unit, you need to define only a single module. If you were to build a multifile assembly using the `DefineDynamicModule()` method, you would specify an optional second parameter that represents the name of a given module (e.g., `myMod.dotnetmodule`). However, when creating a single-file assembly, the name of the module will be identical to the name of the assembly itself. In any case, once the `DefineDynamicModule()` method has returned, you are provided with a reference to a valid `ModuleBuilder` type:

```
// The single-file assembly.
ModuleBuilder module =
     assembly.DefineDynamicModule("MyAssembly", "MyAssembly.dll");
```

The Role of the ModuleBuilder Type

`ModuleBuilder` is key type used during the development of dynamic assemblies. As you would expect, `ModuleBuilder` supports a number of members that allow you to define the set of types contained within a given module (classes, interfaces, structures, etc.) as well as the set of embedded resources (string tables, images, etc.) contained within (the .NET resource format will be examined in Chapter 15). Table 15-11 describes a few of the creation-centric methods. (Do note that each method will return to you a related type that represents the type you wish to construct.)

Table 15-11. *Select Members of the* `ModuleBuilder` *Type*

Method	Meaning in Life
`DefineEnum()`	Used to emit a .NET enum definition
`DefineResource()`	Defines a managed embedded resource to be stored in this module
`DefineType()`	Constructs a `TypeBuilder`, which allows you to define value types, interfaces, and class types (including delegates)

The key member of the `ModuleBuilder` class to be aware of is `DefineType()`. In addition to specifying the name of the type (via a simple string), you will also make use of the `System.Reflection.TypeAttributes` enum to describe the format of the type itself. Table 15-12 lists some (but not all) of the key members the `TypeAttributes` enumeration.

Table 15-12. *Select Members of the* `TypeAttributes` *Enumeration*

Member	Meaning in Life
`Abstract`	Specifies that the type is abstract
`Class`	Specifies that the type is a class
`Interface`	Specifies that the type is an interface
`NestedAssembly`	Specifies that the class is nested with assembly visibility and is thus accessible only by methods within its assembly
`NestedFamAndAssem`	Specifies that the class is nested with assembly and family visibility, and is thus accessible only by methods lying in the intersection of its family and assembly
`NestedFamily`	Specifies that the class is nested with family visibility and is thus accessible only by methods within its own type and any subtypes
`NestedFamORAssem`	Specifies that the class is nested with family or assembly visibility, and is thus accessible only by methods lying in the union of its family and assembly
`NestedPrivate`	Specifies that the class is nested with private visibility
`NestedPublic`	Specifies that the class is nested with public visibility
`NotPublic`	Specifies that the class is not public
`Public`	Specifies that the class is public
`Sealed`	Specifies that the class is concrete and cannot be extended
`Serializable`	Specifies that the class can be serialized

Emitting the HelloClass Type and the String Member Variable

Now that you have a better understanding of the role of the `ModuleBuilder.CreateType()` method, let's examine how you can emit the public `HelloWorld` class type and the private string variable:

```
// Define a public class named "MyAssembly.HelloWorld".
TypeBuilder helloWorldClass = module.DefineType("MyAssembly.HelloWorld",
     TypeAttributes.Public);

// Define a private String member variable named "theMessage".
FieldBuilder msgField =
     helloWorldClass.DefineField("theMessage",
          typeof(string),
          FieldAttributes.Private);
```

Notice how the TypeBuilder.DefineField() method provides access to a FieldBuilder type. The TypeBuilder class also defines other methods that provide access to other "builder" types. For example, DefineConstructor() returns a ConstructorBuilder, DefineProperty() returns a PropertyBuilder, and so forth.

Emitting the Constructors

As mentioned earlier, the TypeBuilder.DefineConstructor() method can be used to define a constructor for the current type. However, when it comes to implementing the constructor of HelloClass, you need to inject raw CIL code into the constructor body, which is responsible for assigning the incoming parameter to the internal private string. To obtain an ILGenerator type, you call the GetILGenerator() method from the respective "builder" type you have reference to (in this case, the ConstructorBuilder type).

The Emit() method of the ILGenerator class is the entity in charge of placing CIL into a member implementation. Emit() itself makes frequent use of the OpCodes class type, which exposes the opcode set of CIL using read-only fields. For example, OpCodes.Ret signals the return of a method call. OpCodes.Stfld makes an assignment to a member variable. OpCodes.Call is used to call a given method (in this case, the base class constructor). That said, ponder the following constructor logic:

```
// Create the custom constructor taking
// a single System.String argument.
Type[] constructorArgs = new Type[1];
constructorArgs[0] = typeof(string);
ConstructorBuilder constructor =
     helloWorldClass.DefineConstructor(MethodAttributes.Public,
          CallingConventions.Standard, constructorArgs);

// Now emit the necessary CIL into the ctor.
ILGenerator constructorIL = constructor.GetILGenerator();
constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_0);
Type objectClass = typeof(object);
ConstructorInfo superConstructor = objectClass.GetConstructor(new Type[0]);
constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Call, superConstructor);    // Call base class ctor.

// Load the object's 'this' pointer on the stack.
constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_0);

// load incoming argument on virtual stack and store in msgField.
constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ldarg_1);
constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Stfld, msgField);          // Assign msgField.
constructorIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ret);                      // Return.
```

Now, as you are well aware, as soon as you define a custom constructor for a type, the default constructor is silently removed. To redefine the no-argument constructor, simply call the DefineDefaultConstructor() method of the TypeBuilder type as so:

```
// Reinsert the default ctor.
helloWorldClass.DefineDefaultConstructor(MethodAttributes.Public);
```

This single call emits the standard CIL code used to define a default constructor:

```
.method public hidebysig specialname rtspecialname
           instance void  .ctor() cil managed
{
      .maxstack  1
      ldarg.0
```

```
      call instance void [mscorlib]System.Object::.ctor()
      ret
}
```

Emitting the HelloWorld() Method

Last but not least, let's examine the process of emitting the `SayHello()` method. The first task is to obtain a `MethodBuilder` type from the `helloWorldClass` variable. Once you do this, you define the method and obtain the underlying `ILGenerator` to inject the CIL instructions:

```
// Create the SayHello method.
MethodBuilder sayHiMethod =
     helloWorldClass.DefineMethod("SayHello",
     MethodAttributes.Public, null, null);
methodIL = sayHiMethod.GetILGenerator();

// Write a line to the Console.
methodIL.EmitWriteLine("Hello there!");
methodIL.Emit(OpCodes.Ret);
```

Here you have established a public method (`MethodAttributes.Public`) that takes no parameters and returns nothing (marked by the null entries contained in the `DefineMethod()` call). Also note the `EmitWriteLine()` call. This helper member of the `ILGenerator` class automatically writes a line to the standard output with minimal fuss and bother.

Using the Dynamically Generated Assembly

Now that you have the logic in place to create and save your assembly, all that's needed is a class to trigger the logic. To come full circle, assume your current project defines a second class named `AsmReader`. The logic in `Main()` obtains the current AppDomain via the `Thread.GetDoMain()` method that will be used to host the assembly you will dynamically create. Once you have a reference, you are able to call the `CreateMyAsm()` method.

To make things a bit more interesting, once the call to `CreateMyAsm()` returns, you will exercise some late binding (see Chapter 12) to load your newly created assembly into memory and interact with the members of the `HelloWorld` class:

```
using System;
using System.Reflection.Emit;
using System.Reflection;
using System.Threading;
...
public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** The Amazing Dynamic Assembly Builder App *****");
          // Get the application domain for the current thread.
          AppDomain curAppDomain = Thread.GetDomain();

          // Create the dynamic assembly using our helper f(x).
          CreateMyAsm(curAppDomain);
          Console.WriteLine("-> Finished creating MyAssembly.dll.");
```

```
            // Now load the new assembly from file.
            Console.WriteLine("-> Loading MyAssembly.dll from file.");
            Assembly a = Assembly.Load("MyAssembly");

            // Get the HelloWorld type.
            Type hello = a.GetType("MyAssembly.HelloWorld");

            // Create HelloWorld object and call the correct ctor.
            Console.Write("-> Enter message to pass HelloWorld class: ");
            string msg = Console.ReadLine();
            object[] ctorArgs = new object[1];
            ctorArgs[0] = msg;
            object obj = Activator.CreateInstance(hello, ctorArgs);

            // Call SayHello and show returned string.
            Console.WriteLine("-> Calling SayHello() via late binding.");
            MethodInfo mi = hello.GetMethod("SayHello");
            mi.Invoke(obj, null);

            // Trigger GetMsg(). Invoke() returns an object that
            // holds the method's return value.
            mi = hello.GetMethod("GetMsg");
            Console.WriteLine(mi.Invoke(obj, null));
        }
}
```

In effect, you have just created a .NET assembly that is able to create .NET assemblies at runtime.

That wraps up our examination of CIL and the role of dynamic assemblies. I hope this chapter has deepened your understanding of the .NET type system and the syntax and semantics of CIL.

■ **Note** Be sure to load your dynamically created assembly into `ildasm.exe` to connect the dots between raw CIL code and the functionality within the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace.

■ **Source Code** The DynAsmBuilder application is included under the Chapter 15 subdirectory.

A Brief Word Regarding System.CodeDOM

Now that you have seen how to build dynamic assemblies using `System.Reflection.Emit` and various CIL tokens, I must confess there is another (often easier) alternative. The .NET platform provides a technology termed *code DOM* that allows you to represent the structure of a .NET type in *language-agnostic* terms via a related object graph. Once this graph has been established using members of the `System.CodeDOM` namespace, you are able to dynamically persist its contents in *language-specific* code files (C#, Visual Basic .NET, or any third-party language that supports a code DOM provider). As well, the `System.CodeDOM.Compiler` namespace (and related namespaces) can be used to compile an in-memory (or persisted) object graph into a valid static .NET assembly.

Alas, I don't have the space to include information regarding code DOM technology in this edition of the text. If you require more information, look up the topic "CodeDOM, quick reference" within the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the syntax and semantics of CIL. Unlike higher-level managed languages such as C#, CIL does not simply define a set of keywords, but provides directives (used to define the structure of an assembly and its types), attributes (which further qualify a given directive), and opcodes (which are used to implementation type members). You were introduced to the CIL compiler (`ilasm.exe`) and learned how to alter the contents of a .NET assembly with new CIL code and also the basic process of building a .NET assembly using raw CIL.

The latter half of this chapter introduced you to the `System.Reflection.Emit` namespace. Using these types, you are able to emit a .NET assembly on the fly to memory. As well, if you so choose, you may persist this in-memory image to a physical file. Recall that many types of `System.Reflection.Emit` will automatically generate the correct CIL directives and attributes using friendly types such as `ConstructorBuilder`, `TypeBuilder`, and so forth. The `ILGenerator` type can be used to inject the necessary CIL opcodes into a given member. While we do have a number of helper types that attempt to make the process of programming with the CIL opcode set more palatable, you must have an understanding of CIL when programming with dynamic assemblies.

PART 4



Programming with the .NET Libraries

CHAPTER 16

The System.IO Namespace

When you are creating full-blown desktop applications, the ability to save information between user sessions is imperative. This chapter examines a number of I/O-related topics as seen through the eyes of the .NET Framework. The first order of business is to explore the core types defined in the `System.IO` namespace and come to understand how to programmatically modify a machine's directory and file structure. Once you can do so, the next task is to explore various ways to read from and write to character-based, binary-based, string-based, and memory-based data stores.

Exploring the System.IO Namespace

In the framework of .NET, the `System.IO` namespace is the region of the base class libraries devoted to file-based (and memory-based) input and output (I/O) services. Like any namespace, `System.IO` defines a set of classes, interfaces, enumerations, structures, and delegates, most of which are contained in `mscorlib.dll`. In addition to the types contained within `mscorlib.dll`, the `System.dll` assembly defines additional members of the `System.IO` namespace (given that all Visual Studio 2005 projects automatically set a reference to both assemblies, you should be ready to go).

Many of the types within the `System.IO` namespace focus on the programmatic manipulation of physical directories and files. However, additional types provide support to read data from and write data to string buffers as well as raw memory locations. To give you a road map of the functionality in `System.IO`, Table 16-1 outlines the core (nonabstract) classes.

Table 16-1. *Key Members of the* `System.IO` *Namespace*

Nonabstract I/O Class Type	Meaning in Life
`BinaryReader` `BinaryWriter`	These types allow you to store and retrieve primitive data types (integers, Booleans, strings, and whatnot) as a binary value.
`BufferedStream`	This type provides temporary storage for a stream of bytes that may be committed to storage at a later time.
`Directory` `DirectoryInfo`	These types are used to manipulate a machine's directory structure. The `Directory` type exposes functionality primarily as *static methods*. The `DirectoryInfo` type exposes similar functionality from a valid *object variable*.
`DriveInfo`	This type (new to .NET 2.0) provides detailed information regarding the drives on a given machine.

Continued

Table 16-1. (*Continued*)

Nonabstract I/O Class Type	Meaning in Life
`File` `FileInfo`	These types are used to manipulate a machine's set of files. The `File` type exposes functionality primarily as *static methods*. The `FileInfo` type exposes similar functionality from a valid *object variable*.
`FileStream`	This type allows for random file access (e.g., seeking capabilities) with data represented as a stream of bytes.
`FileSystemWatcher`	This type allows you to monitor the modification of a given external file.
`MemoryStream`	This type provides random access to streamed data stored in memory rather than a physical file.
`Path`	This type performs operations on `System.String` types that contain file or directory path information in a platform-neutral manner.
`StreamWriter` `StreamReader`	These types are used to store (and retrieve) textual information to (or from) a file. These types do not support random file access.
`StringWriter` `StringReader`	Like the `StreamReader/StreamWriter` types, these classes also work with textual information. However, the underlying storage is a string buffer rather than a physical file.

In addition to these creatable class types, `System.IO` defines a number of enumerations, as well as a set of abstract classes (`Stream`, `TextReader`, `TextWriter`, and so forth), that define a shared polymorphic interface to all descendents. You will read about many of these types in this chapter.

The Directory(Info) and File(Info) Types

`System.IO` provides four types that allow you to manipulate individual files, as well as interact with a machine's directory structure. The first two types, `Directory` and `File`, expose creation, deletion, copying, and moving operations using various static members. The closely related `FileInfo` and `DirectoryInfo` types expose similar functionality as instance-level methods (and therefore must be "`new`-ed"). In Figure 16-1, notice that the `Directory` and `File` types directly extend `System.Object`, while `DirectoryInfo` and `FileInfo` derive from the abstract `FileSystemInfo` type.

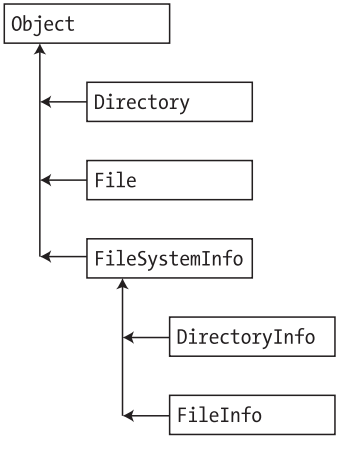


Figure 16-1. *The* `File`*- and* `Directory`*-centric types*

Generally speaking, `FileInfo` and `DirectoryInfo` are better choices for recursive operations (such as enumerating all subdirectories under a given root), as the `Directory` and `File` class members tend to return string values rather than strongly typed objects.

The Abstract FileSystemInfo Base Class

The `DirectoryInfo` and `FileInfo` types receive many behaviors from the abstract `FileSystemInfo` base class. For the most part, the members of the `FileSystemInfo` class are used to discover general characteristics (such as time of creation, various attributes, and so forth) about a given file or directory. Table 16-2 lists some core properties of interest.

Table 16-2. `FileSystemInfo` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Attributes`	Gets or sets the attributes associated with the current file that are represented by the `FileAttributes` enumeration.
`CreationTime`	Gets or sets the time of creation for the current file or directory.
`Exists`	Can be used to determine if a given file or directory exists.
`Extension`	Retrieves a file's extension.
`FullName`	Gets the full path of the directory or file.
`LastAccessTime`	Gets or sets the time the current file or directory was last accessed.
`LastWriteTime`	Gets or sets the time when the current file or directory was last written to.
`Name`	For files, gets the name of the file. For directories, gets the name of the last directory in the hierarchy if a hierarchy exists. Otherwise, the `Name` property gets the name of the directory.

The `FileSystemInfo` type also defines the `Delete()` method. This is implemented by derived types to delete a given file or directory from the hard drive. As well, `Refresh()` can be called prior to obtaining attribute information to ensure that the statistics regarding the current file (or directory) are not outdated.

Working with the DirectoryInfo Type

The first creatable I/O-centric type you will examine is the `DirectoryInfo` class. This class contains a set of members used for creating, moving, deleting, and enumerating over directories and subdirectories. In addition to the functionality provided by its base class (`FileSystemInfo`), `DirectoryInfo` offers the key members in Table 16-3.

Table 16-3. *Key Members of the* `DirectoryInfo` *Type*

Members	Meaning in Life
`Create()` `CreateSubdirectory()`	Create a directory (or set of subdirectories), given a path name
`Delete()`	Deletes a directory and all its contents
`GetDirectories()`	Returns an array of strings that represent all subdirectories in the current directory

Continued

Table 16-3. (*Continued*)

Members	Meaning in Life
`GetFiles()`	Retrieves an array of `FileInfo` types that represent a set of files in the given directory
`MoveTo()`	Moves a directory and its contents to a new path
`Parent`	Retrieves the parent directory of the specified path
`Root`	Gets the root portion of a path

You begin working with the `DirectoryInfo` type by specifying a particular directory path as a constructor parameter. If you want to obtain access to the current application directory (i.e., the directory of the executing application), use the "`.`" notation. Here are some examples:

```
// Bind to the current application directory.
DirectoryInfo dir1 = new DirectoryInfo(".");

// Bind to C:\Windows,
// using a verbatim string.
DirectoryInfo dir2 = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Windows");
```

In the second example, you are making the assumption that the path passed into the constructor (C:\Windows) already exists on the physical machine. However, if you attempt to interact with a nonexistent directory, a `System.IO.DirectoryNotFoundException` is thrown. Thus, if you specify a directory that is not yet created, you will need to call the `Create()` method before proceeding:

```
// Bind to a nonexistent directory, then create it.
DirectoryInfo dir3 = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Windows\Testing");
dir3.Create();
```

Once you have created a `DirectoryInfo` object, you can investigate the underlying directory contents using any of the properties inherited from `FileSystemInfo`. To illustrate, the following class creates a new `DirectoryInfo` object mapped to C:\Windows (adjust your path if need be) and displays a number of interesting statistics (see Figure 16-2 for output):

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Directory(Info) *****\n");
          DirectoryInfo dir = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Windows");

          // Dump directory information.
          Console.WriteLine("***** Directory Info *****");
          Console.WriteLine("FullName: {0} ", dir.FullName);
          Console.WriteLine("Name: {0} ", dir.Name);
          Console.WriteLine("Parent: {0} ", dir.Parent);
          Console.WriteLine("Creation: {0} ", dir.CreationTime);
          Console.WriteLine("Attributes: {0} ", dir.Attributes);
          Console.WriteLine("Root: {0} ", dir.Root);
          Console.WriteLine("**************************\n");
     }
}
```

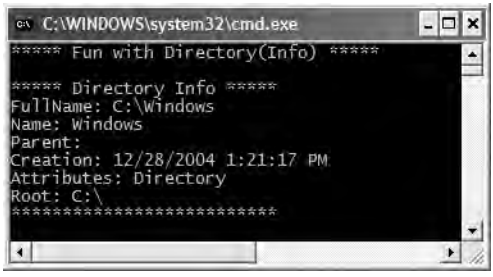


Figure 16-2. *Information about your Windows directory*

The FileAttributes Enumeration

The `Attributes` property exposed by `FileSystemInfo` provides various traits for the current directory or file, all of which are represented by the `FileAttributes` enumeration (enum). While the names of this enum are fairly self-describing, some of the less obvious names are documented here (consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details):

```
public enum FileAttributes
{
     ReadOnly,
     Hidden,
     //  The file is part of the operating system or is used
     //  exclusively by the operating system
     System,
     Directory,
     Archive,
     // This name is reserved for future use.
     Device,
     // The file is 'normal' as it has no other attributes set.
     Normal,
     Temporary,
     // Sparse files are typically large files whose data are mostly zeros.
     SparseFile,
     // A block of user-defined data associated with a file or a directory
     ReparsePoint,
     Compressed,
     Offline,
     // The file will not be indexed by the operating system's
     // content indexing service.
     NotContentIndexed,
     Encrypted
}
```

Enumerating Files with the DirectoryInfo Type

In addition to obtaining basic details of an existing directory, you can extend the current example to use some methods of the `DirectoryInfo` type. First, let's leverage the `GetFiles()` method to obtain information about all `*.bmp` files located under the C:\Windows directory. This method returns an array of `FileInfo` types, each of which exposes details of a particular file (full details of the `FileInfo` type are explored later in this chapter):

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Directory(Info) *****\n");
          DirectoryInfo dir = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Windows");
          ...
          // Get all files with a *.bmp extension.
          FileInfo[] bitmapFiles = dir.GetFiles("*.bmp");

          // How many were found?
          Console.WriteLine("Found {0}  *.bmp files\n", bitmapFiles.Length);

               // Now print out info for each file.
               foreach (FileInfo f in bitmapFiles)
               {
                    Console.WriteLine("***************************\n");
                    Console.WriteLine("File name: {0} ", f.Name);
                    Console.WriteLine("File size: {0} ", f.Length);
                    Console.WriteLine("Creation: {0} ", f.CreationTime);
                    Console.WriteLine("Attributes: {0} ", f.Attributes);
                    Console.WriteLine("***************************\n");
               }
     }
}
```

Once you run the application, you see a listing something like that shown in Figure 16-3. (Your bitmaps may vary!)

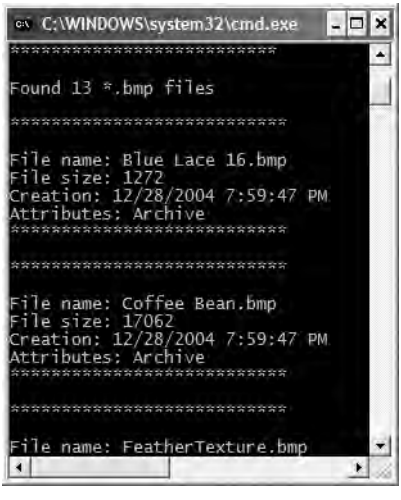


Figure 16-3. *Bitmap file information*

Creating Subdirectories with the DirectoryInfo Type

You can programmatically extend a directory structure using the `DirectoryInfo.CreateSubdirectory()` method. This method can create a single subdirectory, as well as multiple nested subdirectories, in a single function call. To illustrate, here is a block of code that extends the directory structure of C:\Windows with some custom subdirectories:

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Directory(Info) *****\n");
          DirectoryInfo dir = new DirectoryInfo(@"C:\Windows");
          ...
          // Create \MyFoo off initial directory.
          dir.CreateSubdirectory("MyFoo");

          // Create \MyBar\MyQaaz off initial directory.
          dir.CreateSubdirectory(@"MyBar\MyQaaz");
     }
}
```

If you examine your Windows directory using Windows Explorer, you will see that the new subdirectories are present and accounted for (see Figure 16-4).



Figure 16-4. *Creating subdirectories*

Although you are not required to capture the return value of the `CreateSubdirectory()` method, be aware that a `DirectoryInfo` type representing the newly created item is passed back on successful execution:

```
// CreateSubdirectory() returns a DirectoryInfo item representing the new item.
DirectoryInfo d = dir.CreateSubdirectory("MyFoo");
Console.WriteLine("Created: {0} ", d.FullName);

d = dir. CreateSubdirectory(@"MyBar\MyQaaz");
Console.WriteLine("Created: {0} ", d.FullName);
```

Working with the Directory Type

Now that you have seen the `DirectoryInfo` type in action, you can learn about the `Directory` type. For the most part, the members of `Directory` mimic the functionality provided by the instance-level members defined by `DirectoryInfo`. Recall, however, that the members of `Directory` typically return string types rather than strongly typed `FileInfo`/`DirectoryInfo` types.

To illustrate some functionality of the `Directory` type, the final iteration of this example displays the names of all drives mapped to the current computer (via the `Directory.GetLogicalDrives()` method) and uses the static `Directory.Delete()` method to remove the \MyFoo and \MyBar\MyQaaz subdirectories previously created:

```
class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
...
          // List all drives on current computer.
          string[] drives = Directory.GetLogicalDrives();
          Console.WriteLine("Here are your drives:");
          foreach(string s in drives)
               Console.WriteLine("->{0} ", s);

          // Delete what was created.
          Console.WriteLine("Press Enter to delete directories");
          Console.ReadLine();
          try
          {
               Directory.Delete(@"C:\Windows\MyFoo");

               // The second parameter specifies if you
               // wish to destroy any subdirectories.
               Directory.Delete(@"C:\Windows\MyBar", true);
          }
          catch(IOException e)
          {
               Console.WriteLine(e.Message);
          }
     }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The MyDirectoryApp project is located under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Working with the DriveInfo Class Type

As of .NET 2.0, the `System.IO` namespace provides a class named `DriveInfo`. Like `Directory.GetLogicalDrives()`, the static `DriveInfo.GetDrives()` method allows you to discover the names of a machine's drives. Unlike `Directory.GetLogicalDrives()`, however, `DriveInfo` provides numerous other details (such as the drive type, available free space, volume label, and whatnot). Consider the following sample code:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with DriveInfo *****\n");

        // Get info regarding all drives.
        DriveInfo[] myDrives = DriveInfo.GetDrives();

        // Now print drive stats.
        foreach(DriveInfo d in myDrives)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("Name: {0}", d.Name);
            Console.WriteLine("Type: {0}", d.DriveType);
```

```
            // Check to see if the drive is mounted.
            if (d.IsReady)
            {
                Console.WriteLine("Free space: {0}", d.TotalFreeSpace);
                Console.WriteLine("Format: {0}", d.DriveFormat);
                Console.WriteLine("Label: {0}\n", d.VolumeLabel);
            }
        }
        Console.ReadLine();
    }
}
```

Figure 16-5 shows the output based on my current machine.

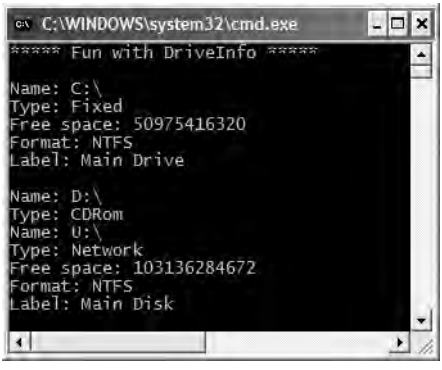


Figure 16-5. *Gather drive details via* `DriveInfo`

At this point, you have investigated some core behaviors of the `Directory`, `DirectoryInfo`, and `DriveInfo` classes. Next, you'll learn how to create, open, close, and destroy the files that populate a given directory.

■ **Source Code** The DriveTypeApp project is located under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Working with the FileInfo Class

As shown in the MyDirectoryApp example, the `FileInfo` class allows you to obtain details regarding existing files on your hard drive (time created, size, file attributes, and so forth) and aids in the creation, copying, moving, and destruction of files. In addition to the set of functionality inherited by `FileSystemInfo` are some core members unique to the `FileInfo` class, which are described in Table 16-4.

Table 16-4. `FileInfo` *Core Members*

Member	Meaning in Life
`AppendText()`	Creates a `StreamWriter` type (described later) that appends text to a file
`CopyTo()`	Copies an existing file to a new file
`Create()`	Creates a new file and returns a `FileStream` type (described later) to interact with the newly created file
`CreateText()`	Creates a `StreamWriter` type that writes a new text file
`Delete()`	Deletes the file to which a `FileInfo` instance is bound
`Directory`	Gets an instance of the parent directory
`DirectoryName`	Gets the full path to the parent directory
`Length`	Gets the size of the current file or directory
`MoveTo()`	Moves a specified file to a new location, providing the option to specify a new filename
`Name`	Gets the name of the file
`Open()`	Opens a file with various read/write and sharing privileges
`OpenRead()`	Creates a read-only `FileStream`
`OpenText()`	Creates a `StreamReader` type (described later) that reads from an existing text file
`OpenWrite()`	Creates a write-only `FileStream` type

It is important to understand that a majority of the members of the `FileInfo` class return a specific I/O-centric object (`FileStream`, `StreamWriter`, and so forth) that allows you to begin reading and writing data to (or reading from) the associated file in a variety of formats. You will check out these types in just a moment, but until then, let's examine various ways to obtain a file handle using the `FileInfo` class type.

The FileInfo.Create() Method

The first way you can create a file handle is to make use of the `FileInfo.Create()` method:

```
public class Program
{
     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          // Make a new file on the C drive.
          FileInfo f = new FileInfo(@"C:\Test.dat");
          FileStream fs = f.Create();

          // Use the FileStream object...

          // Close down file stream.
          fs.Close();
     }
}
```

Notice that the `FileInfo.Create()` method returns a `FileStream` type, which exposes synchronous and asynchronous write/read operations to/from the underlying file. Do know that the `FileStream` object returned by `FileInfo.Create()` grants full read/write access to all users.

The FileInfo.Open() Method

You can use the `FileInfo.Open()` method to open existing files as well as create new files with far more precision than `FileInfo.Create()`. Once the call to `Open()` completes, you are returned a `FileStream` object. Ponder the following logic:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Make a new file via FileInfo.Open().
     FileInfo f2 = new FileInfo(@"C:\Test2.dat");
     FileStream fs2 = f2.Open( FileMode.OpenOrCreate,
          FileAccess.ReadWrite, FileShare.None);

     // Use the FileStream object...

     // Close down file stream.
     fs2.Close();
}
```

This version of the overloaded `Open()` method requires three parameters. The first parameter specifies the general flavor of the I/O request (e.g., make a new file, open an existing file, append to a file, etc.), which is specified using the `FileMode` enumeration:

```
public enum FileMode
{
     // Specifies that the operating system should create a new file.
     // If the file already exists, a System.IO.IOException is thrown.
     CreateNew,
     // Specifies that the operating system should create a new file.
     // If the file already exists, it will be overwritten.
     Create,
     Open,
     // Specifies that the operating system should open a file if it exists;
     otherwise, a new file should be created.
     OpenOrCreate,
     Truncate,
     Append
}
```

The second parameter, a value from the `FileAccess` enumeration, is used to determine the read/write behavior of the underlying stream:

```
public enum FileAccess
{
     Read,
     Write,
     ReadWrite
}
```

Finally, you have the third parameter, `FileShare`, which specifies how the file is to be shared among other file handlers. Here are the core names:

```
public enum FileShare
{
     None,
     Read,
     Write,
     ReadWrite
}
```

The FileInfo.OpenRead() and FileInfo.OpenWrite() Methods

While the `FileInfo.Open()` method allows you to obtain a file handle in a very flexible manner, the `FileInfo` class also provides members named `OpenRead()` and `OpenWrite()`. As you might imagine, these methods return a properly configured read-only or write-only `FileStream` type, without the need to supply various enumeration values. Like `FileInfo.Create()` and `FileInfo.Open()`, `OpenRead()` and `OpenWrite()` return a `FileStream` object:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Get a FileStream object with read-only permissions.
     FileInfo f3 = new FileInfo(@"C:\Test3.dat");
     FileStream readOnlyStream = f3.OpenRead();

     // Use the FileStream object...

     readOnlyStream.Close();

     // Now get a FileStream object with write-only permissions.
     FileInfo f4 = new FileInfo(@"C:\ Test4.dat");
     FileStream writeOnlyStream = f4.OpenWrite();

     // Use the FileStream object...

     writeOnlyStream.Close();
}
```

The FileInfo.OpenText() Method

Another open-centric member of the `FileInfo` type is `OpenText()`. Unlike `Create()`, `Open()`, `OpenRead()`, and `OpenWrite()`, the `OpenText()` method returns an instance of the `StreamReader` type, rather than a `FileStream` type:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Get a StreamReader object.
     FileInfo f5 = new FileInfo(@"C:\boot.ini");
     StreamReader sreader = f5.OpenText();

     // Use the StreamReader object...

     sreader.Close();
}
```

As you will see shortly, the `StreamReader` type provides a way to read character data from the underlying file.

The FileInfo.CreateText() and FileInfo.AppendText() Methods

The final two methods of interest at this point are `CreateText()` and `AppendText()`, both of which return a `StreamWriter` reference, as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     FileInfo f6 = new FileInfo(@"C:\Test5.txt");
     StreamWriter swriter = f6.CreateText();

     // Use the StreamWriter object...

     swriter.Close();

     FileInfo f7 = new FileInfo(@"C:\FinalTest.txt");
     StreamWriter swriterAppend = f7.AppendText();

     // Use the StreamWriter object...

     swriterAppend.Close();
}
```

As you would guess, the `StreamWriter` type provides a way to write character data to the underlying file.

Working with the File Type

The `File` type provides functionality almost identical to that of the `FileInfo` type, using a number of static members. Like `FileInfo`, `File` supplies `AppendText()`, `Create()`, `CreateText()`, `Open()`, `OpenRead()`, `OpenWrite()`, and `OpenText()` methods. In fact, in many cases, the `File` and `FileStream` types may be used interchangeably. To illustrate, each of the previous `FileStream` examples can be simplified by using the `File` type instead:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Obtain FileStream object via File.Create().
    FileStream fs = File.Create(@"C:\Test.dat");
    fs.Close();

    // Obtain FileStream object via File.Open().
    FileStream fs2 = File.Open(@"C:\Test2.dat",
        FileMode.OpenOrCreate,
        FileAccess.ReadWrite, FileShare.None);
    fs2.Close();

    // Get a FileStream object with read-only permissions.
    FileStream readOnlyStream = File.OpenRead(@"Test3.dat");
    readOnlyStream.Close();

    // Get a FileStream object with write-only permissions.
    FileStream writeOnlyStream = File.OpenWrite(@"Test4.dat");
    writeOnlyStream.Close();

    // Get a StreamReader object.
    StreamReader sreader = File.OpenText(@"C:\boot.ini");
    sreader.Close();
```

```
    // Get some StreamWriters.
    StreamWriter swriter = File.CreateText(@"C:\Test3.txt");
    swriter.Close();
    StreamWriter swriterAppend = File.AppendText(@"C:\FinalTest.txt");
    swriterAppend.Close();
}
```

New .NET 2.0 File Members

Unlike `FileInfo`, the `File` type supports a few unique members (as of .NET 2.0) shown in Table 16-5, which can greatly simplify the processes of reading and writing textual data.

Table 16-5. *Methods of the* `File` *Type*

Method	Meaning in Life
`ReadAllBytes()`	Opens the specified file, returns the binary data as an array of bytes, and then closes the file
`ReadAllLines()`	Opens a specified file, returns the character data as an array of strings, and then closes the file
`ReadAllText()`	Opens a specified file, returns the character data as a `System.String`, and then closes the file
`WriteAllBytes()`	Opens the specified file, writes out the byte array, and then closes the file
`WriteAllLines()`	Opens a specified file, writes out an array of strings, and then closes the file
`WriteAllText()`	Opens a specified file, writes the character data, and then closes the file

Using these new methods of the `File` type, you are able to read and write batches of data in just a few lines of code. Even better, each of these new members automatically closes down the underlying file handle, for example:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        string[] myTasks = {
            "Fix bathroom sink",
            "Call Dave",
            "Call Mom and Dad",
            "Play XBox"};

        // Write out all data to file on C drive.
        File.WriteAllLines(@"C:\tasks.txt", myTasks);

        // Read it all back and print out.
        foreach (string task in File.ReadAllLines(@"C:\tasks.txt"))
        {
            Console.WriteLine("TODO: {0}", task);
        }
    }
}
```

Clearly, when you wish to quickly obtain a file handle, the `File` type will save you some keystrokes. However, one benefit of first creating a `FileInfo` object is that you are able to investigate the file using the members of the abstract `FileSystemInfo` base class:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Display info about boot.ini and then open
    // for read-only access.
    FileInfo bootFile = new FileInfo(@"C:\boot.ini");
    Console.WriteLine(bootFile.CreationTime);
    Console.WriteLine(bootFile.LastAccessTime);
    FileStream readOnlyStream = bootFile.OpenRead();
    readOnlyStream.Close();
}
```

The Abstract Stream Class

At this point, you have seen numerous ways to obtain `FileStream`, `StreamReader`, and `StreamWriter` objects, but you have yet to read data from, or written data to, a file using these types. To understand how to do so, you'll need to become familiar with the concept of a stream. In the world of I/O manipulation, a *stream* represents a chunk of data. Streams provide a common way to interact with *a sequence of bytes*, regardless of what kind of device (file, network connection, printer, etc.) is storing or displaying the bytes in question.

The abstract `System.IO.Stream` class defines a number of members that provide support for synchronous and asynchronous interactions with the storage medium (e.g., an underlying file or memory location). Figure 16-6 shows a few descendents of the `Stream` type.

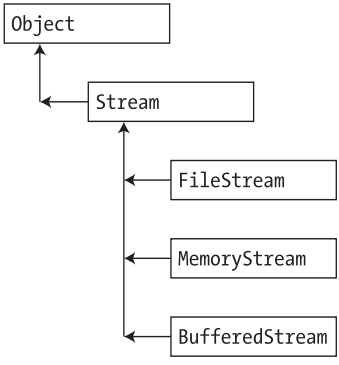


Figure 16-6. `Stream`-*derived types*

■ **Note** Be aware that the concept of a stream is not limited to files or memory locations. To be sure, the .NET libraries provide stream access to networks and other stream-centric abstractions.

Again, `Stream` descendents represent data as a raw stream of bytes; therefore, working with raw streams can be quite cryptic. Some `Stream`-derived types support *seeking*, which refers to the process of obtaining and adjusting the current position in the stream. To begin understanding the functionality provided by the `Stream` class, take note of the core members described in Table 16-6.

Table 16-6. *Abstract* `Stream` *Members*

Members	Meaning in Life

`CanRead`
`CanSeek`
`CanWrite`
	Determine whether the current stream supports reading, seeking, and/or writing.

`Close()`	Closes the current stream and releases any resources (such as sockets and file handles) associated with the current stream.
`Flush()`	Updates the underlying data source or repository with the current state of the buffer and then clears the buffer. If a stream does not implement a buffer, this method does nothing.
`Length`	Returns the length of the stream, in bytes.
`Position`	Determines the position in the current stream.
`Read()` `ReadByte()`	Read a sequence of bytes (or a single byte) from the current stream and advance the current position in the stream by the number of bytes read.
`Seek()`	Sets the position in the current stream.
`SetLength()`	Sets the length of the current stream.
`Write()` `WriteByte()`	Write a sequence of bytes (or a single byte) to the current stream and advance the current position in this stream by the number of bytes written.

Working with FileStreams

The `FileStream` class provides an implementation for the abstract `Stream` members in a manner appropriate for file-based streaming. It is a fairly primitive stream; it can read or write only a single byte or an array of bytes. In reality, you will not often need to directly interact with the members of the `FileStream` type. Rather, you will most likely make use of various *stream wrappers*, which make it easier to work with textual data or .NET types. Nevertheless, for illustrative purposes, let's experiment with the synchronous read/write capabilities of the `FileStream` type.

Assume you have a new console application named FileStreamApp. Your goal is to write a simple text message to a new file named `myMessage.dat`. However, given that `FileStream` can operate only on raw bytes, you will be required to encode the `System.String` type into a corresponding byte array. Luckily, the `System.Text` namespace defines a type named `Encoding`, which provides members that encode and decode strings to (or from) an array of bytes (check out the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details of the `Encoding` type).

Once encoded, the byte array is persisted to file using the `FileStream.Write()` method. To read the bytes back into memory, you must reset the internal position of the stream (via the `Position` property) and call the `ReadByte()` method. Finally, you display the raw byte array and the decoded string to the console. Here is the complete `Main()` method:

```
// Don't forget to 'use' System.Text.
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with FileStreams *****\n");

    // Obtain a FileStream object.
    FileStream fStream = File.Open(@"C:\myMessage.dat",
          FileMode.Create);
```

```
    // Encode a string as an array of bytes.
    string msg = "Hello!";
    byte[] msgAsByteArray = Encoding.Default.GetBytes(msg);

    // Write byte[] to file.
    fStream.Write(msgAsByteArray, 0, msgAsByteArray.Length);

    // Reset internal position of stream.
    fStream.Position = 0;

    // Read the types from file and display to console.
    Console.Write("Your message as an array of bytes: ");
    byte[] bytesFromFile = new byte[msgAsByteArray.Length];
    for (int i = 0; i < msgAsByteArray.Length; i++)
    {
        bytesFromFile[i] = (byte)fStream.ReadByte();
        Console.Write(bytesFromFile[i]);
    }

    // Display decoded messages.
    Console.Write("\nDecoded Message: ");
    Console.WriteLine(Encoding.Default.GetString(bytesFromFile));

    // Close stream.
    fStream.Close();
}
```

While this example does indeed populate the file with data, it punctuates the major downfall of working directly with the `FileStream` type: it demands to operate on raw bytes. Other `Stream`-derived types operate in a similar manner. For example, if you wish to write a sequence of bytes to a region of memory, you can allocate a `MemoryStream`. Likewise, if you wish to push an array of bytes through a network connection, you can make use of the `NetworkStream` type.

Thankfully, the `System.IO` namespace provides a number of "reader" and "writer" types that encapsulate the details of working with `Stream`-derived types.

■ **Source Code** The FileStreamApp project is included under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Working with StreamWriters and StreamReaders

The `StreamWriter` and `StreamReader` classes are useful whenever you need to read or write character-based data (e.g., strings). Both of these types work by default with Unicode characters; however, you can change this by supplying a properly configured `System.Text.Encoding` object reference. To keep things simple, let's assume that the default Unicode encoding fits the bill.

`StreamReader` derives from an abstract type named `TextReader`, as does the related `StringReader` type (discussed later in this chapter). The `TextReader` base class provides a very limited set of functionality to each of these descendents, specifically the ability to read and peek into a character stream.

The `StreamWriter` type (as well as `StringWriter`, also examined later in this chapter) derives from an abstract base class named `TextWriter`. This class defines members that allow derived types to write textual data to a given character stream. The relationship between each of these new I/O-centric types is shown in Figure 16-7.

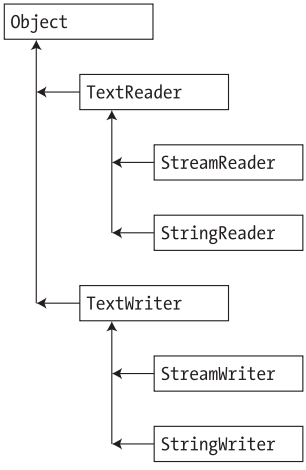


Figure 16-7. *Readers and writers*

To aid in your understanding of the core writing capabilities of the `StreamWriter` and `StringWriter` classes, Table 16-7 describes the core members of the abstract `TextWriter` base class.

Table 16-7. *Core Members of* `TextWriter`

Member	Meaning in Life
`Close()`	Closes the writer and frees any associated resources. In the process, the buffer is automatically flushed.
`Flush()`	Clears all buffers for the current writer and causes any buffered data to be written to the underlying device, but does not close the writer.
`NewLine`	Indicates the newline constant for the derived writer class. The default line terminator is a carriage return followed by a line feed (`\r\n`).
`Write()`	Writes a line to the text stream without a newline constant.
`WriteLine()`	Writes a line to the text stream with a newline constant.

■ **Note** The last two members of the `TextWriter` class probably look familiar to you. If you recall, the `System.Console` type has `Write()` and `WriteLine()` members that push textual data to the standard output device. In fact, the `Console.In` property wraps a `TextWriter`, and the `Console.Out` property wraps a `TextReader`.

The derived `StreamWriter` class provides an appropriate implementation for the `Write()`, `Close()`, and `Flush()` methods, and it defines the additional `AutoFlush` property. This property, when set to true, forces `StreamWriter` to flush all data every time you perform a write operation. Be aware that you can gain better performance by setting `AutoFlush` to false, provided you always call `Close()` when you are done writing with a `StreamWriter`.

Writing to a Text File

Now for an example of working with the `StreamWriter` type. The following class creates a new file named `reminders.txt` using the `File.CreateText()` method. Using the obtained `StreamWriter` object, you add some textual data to the new file, as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with StreamWriter / StreamReader *****\n");

    // Get a StreamWriter and write string data.
    StreamWriter writer = File.CreateText("reminders.txt");
    writer.WriteLine("Don't forget Mother's Day this year...");
    writer.WriteLine("Don't forget Father's Day this year...");
    writer.WriteLine("Don't forget these numbers:");
    for(int i = 0; i < 10; i++)
        writer.Write(i + " ");

    // Insert a new line.
    writer.Write(writer.NewLine);

    // Closing automatically flushes!
    writer.Close();
    Console.WriteLine("Created file and wrote some thoughts...");
}
```

Once you run this program, you can examine the contents of this new file (see Figure 16-8).

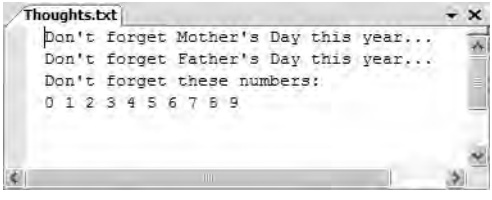


Figure 16-8. *The contents of your* `*.txt` *file*

Reading from a Text File

Now you need to understand how to programmatically read data from a file using the corresponding `StreamReader` type. As you recall, this class derives from `TextReader`, which offers the functionality described in Table 16-8.

Table 16-8. `TextReader` *Core Members*

Member	Meaning in Life
`Peek()`	Returns the next available character without actually changing the position of the reader. A value of –1 indicates you are at the end of the stream.
`Read()`	Reads data from an input stream.
`ReadBlock()`	Reads a maximum of count characters from the current stream and writes the data to a buffer, beginning at index.
`ReadLine()`	Reads a line of characters from the current stream and returns the data as a string (a null string indicates EOF).
`ReadToEnd()`	Reads all characters from the current position to the end of the stream and returns them as a single string.

If you now extend the current `MyStreamWriterReader` class to use a `StreamReader`, you can read in the textual data from the `reminders.txt` file as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with StreamWriter / StreamReader *****\n");
...

    // Now read data from file.
    Console.WriteLine("Here are your thoughts:\n");
    StreamReader sr = File.OpenText("reminders.txt");

    string input = null;
    while ((input = sr.ReadLine()) != null)
    {
        Console.WriteLine (input);
    }
}
```

Once you run the program, you will see the character data within `Thoughts.txt` displayed to the console.

Directly Creating StreamWriter/StreamReader Types

One of the slightly confusing aspects of working with the types within `System.IO` is that you can often achieve an identical result using numerous approaches. For example, you have already seen that you can obtain a `StreamWriter` via the `File` or `FileInfo` type using the `CreateText()` method. In reality, there is yet another way in which you can work with `StreamWriters` and `StreamReaders`: create them directly. For example, the current application could be retrofitted as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with StreamWriter / StreamReader *****\n");

     // Get a StreamWriter and write string data.
     StreamWriter writer = new StreamWriter("reminders.txt");
    ...

    // Now read data from file.
    StreamReader sr = new StreamReader("reminders.txt");
     ...
}
```

Although it can be a bit confusing to see so many seemingly identical approaches to file I/O, keep in mind that the end result is greater flexibility. In any case, now that you have seen how to move character data to and from a given file using the `StreamWriter` and `StreamReader` types, you will next examine the role of the `StringWriter` and `StringReader` classes.

■ **Source Code** The StreamWriterReaderApp project is included under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Working with StringWriters and StringReaders

Using the `StringWriter` and `StringReader` types, you can treat textual information as a stream of in-memory characters. This can prove helpful when you wish to append character-based information to an underlying buffer. To illustrate, the following example writes a block of string data to a `StringWriter` object rather than a file on the local hard drive:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with StringWriter / StringReader *****\n");

    // Create a StringWriter and emit character data to memory.
    StringWriter strWriter = new StringWriter();
    strWriter.WriteLine("Don't forget Mother's Day this year...");
    strWriter.Close();

    // Get a copy of the contents (stored in a string) and pump
    // to console.
    Console.WriteLine("Contents of StringWriter:\n{0}", strWriter);
}
```

Because `StringWriter` and `StreamWriter` both derive from the same base class (`TextWriter`), the writing logic is more or less identical. However, given that nature of `StringWriter`, be aware that this class allows you to extract a `System.Text.StringBuilder` object via the `GetStringBuilder()` method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with StringWriter / StringReader *****\n");

    // Create a StringWriter and emit character data to memory.
    StringWriter strWriter = new StringWriter();
...
    // Get the internal StringBuilder.
    StringBuilder sb = strWriter.GetStringBuilder();
    sb.Insert(0, "Hey!! ");
    Console.WriteLine("-> {0}", sb.ToString());
    sb.Remove(0, "Hey!! ".Length);
    Console.WriteLine("-> {0}", sb.ToString());
}
```

When you wish to read from a stream of character data, make use of the corresponding `StringReader` type, which (as you would expect) functions identically to the related `StreamReader` class. In fact, the `StringReader` class does nothing more than override the inherited members to read from a block of character data, rather than a file, as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with StringWriter / StringReader *****\n");

     // Create a StringWriter and emit character data to memory.
     StringWriter strWriter = new StringWriter();
...
     // Read data from the StringWriter.
     StringReader strReader = new StringReader(writer.ToString());
     string input = null;
     while ((input = strReader.ReadLine()) != null)
     {
         Console.WriteLine (input);
     }
     strReader.Close();
}
```

■ **Source Code** The StringReaderWriterApp is included under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Working with BinaryWriters and BinaryReaders

The final writer/reader sets you will examine here are `BinaryReader` and `BinaryWriter`, both of which derive directly from `System.Object`. These types allow you to read and write discrete *data types* to an underlying stream in a compact binary format. The `BinaryWriter` class defines a highly overloaded `Write()` method to place a data type in the underlying stream. In addition to `Write()`, `BinaryWriter` provides additional members that allow you to get or set the `Stream`-derived type and offers support for random access to the data (see Table 16-9).

Table 16-9. `BinaryWriter` *Core Members*

Member	Meaning in Life
`BaseStream`	This read-only property provides access to the underlying stream used with the `BinaryWriter` object.
`Close()`	This method closes the binary stream.
`Flush()`	This method flushes the binary stream.
`Seek()`	This method sets the position in the current stream.
`Write()`	This method writes a value to the current stream.

The `BinaryReader` class complements the functionality offered by `BinaryWriter` with the members described in Table 16-10.

Table 16-10. `BinaryReader` *Core Members*

Member	Meaning in Life
`BaseStream`	This read-only property provides access to the underlying stream used with the `BinaryReader` object.
`Close()`	This method closes the binary reader.
`PeekChar()`	This method returns the next available character without actually advancing the position in the stream.
`Read()`	This method reads a given set of bytes or characters and stores them in the incoming array.
`ReadXXXX()`	The `BinaryReader` class defines numerous `ReadXXXX()` methods that grab the next type from the stream (`ReadBoolean()`, `ReadByte()`, `ReadInt32()`, and so forth).

The following example writes a number of data types to a new `*.dat` file:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Open a binary writer for a file.
    FileInfo f = new FileInfo("BinFile.dat");
    BinaryWriter bw = new BinaryWriter(f.OpenWrite());

    // Print out the type of BaseStream.
    // (System.IO.FileStream in this case).
    Console.WriteLine("Base stream is: {0}", bw.BaseStream);

    // Create some data to save in the file
    double aDouble = 1234.67;
    int anInt = 34567;
    char[] aCharArray = { 'A', 'B', 'C' };
```

```
    // Write the data
    bw.Write(aDouble);
    bw.Write(anInt);
    bw.Write(aCharArray);
    bw.Close();
}
```

Notice how the `FileStream` object returned from `FileInfo.OpenWrite()` is passed to the constructor of the `BinaryWriter` type. Using this technique, it is very simple to "layer in" a stream before writing out the data. Do understand that the constructor of `BinaryWriter` takes any `Stream`-derived type (e.g., `FileStream`, `MemoryStream`, or `BufferedStream`). Thus, if you would rather write binary data to memory, simply supply a valid `MemoryStream` object.

To read the data out of the `BinFile.dat` file, the `BinaryReader` type provides a number of options. Here, you will make use of `PeekChar()` to determine if the stream still has data to provide and, if so, use `ReadByte()` to obtain the value. Note that you are formatting the bytes in hexadecimal and inserting seven spaces between each:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Open a binary writer for a file.
    FileInfo f = new FileInfo("BinFile.dat");
...
    // Read the data as raw bytes
    BinaryReader br = new BinaryReader(f.OpenRead());
    int temp = 0;
    while (br.PeekChar() != -1)
    {
        Console.Write("{0,7:x} ", br.ReadByte());
        if (++temp == 4)
        {
            // Write a new line every 4 bytes
            Console.WriteLine();
            temp = 0;
        }
    }
    Console.WriteLine();
}
```

The output of this program appears in Figure 16-9.

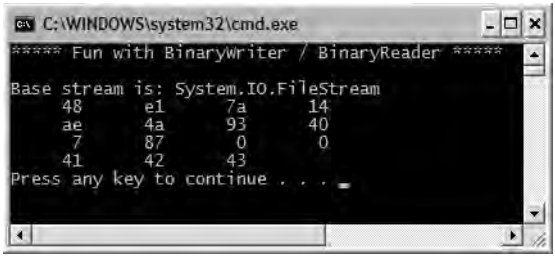

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Fun with BinaryWriter / BinaryReader *****
Base stream is: System.IO.FileStream
48 e1 7a 14
ae 4a 93 40
7 87 0 0
41 42 43
Press any key to continue . . .

Figure 16-9. *Reading bytes from a binary file*

■ **Source Code** The BinaryWriterReader application is included under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Programmatically "Watching" Files

Now that you have a better handle on the use of various readers and writers, next you'll look at the role of the `FileSystemWatcher` class. This type can be quite helpful when you wish to programmatically monitor (or "watch") files on your system. Specifically, the `FileSystemWatcher` type can be instructed to monitor files for any of the actions specified by the `NotifyFilters` enumeration (while many of these members are self-explanatory, check the online help for further details):

```
public enum System.IO.NotifyFilters
{
    Attributes, CreationTime,
    DirectoryName, FileName,
    LastAccess, LastWrite,
    Security, Size,
}
```

The first step you will need to take to work with the `FileSystemWatcher` type is to set the `Path` property to specify the name (and location) of the directory that contains the files to be monitored, as well as the `Filter` property that defines the file extensions of the files to be monitored.

At this point, you may choose to handle the `Changed`, `Created`, and `Deleted` events, all of which work in conjunction with the `FileSystemEventHandler` delegate. This delegate can call any method matching the following pattern:

```
// The FileSystemEventHandler delegate must point
// to methods matching the following signature.
void MyNotificationHandler(object source, FileSystemEventArgs e)
```

As well, the `Renamed` event may also be handled via the `RenamedEventHandler` delegate type, which can call methods matching the following signature:

```
// The RenamedEventHandler delegate must point
// to methods matching the following signature.
void MyNotificationHandler(object source, RenamedEventArgs e)
```

To illustrate the process of watching a file, assume you have created a new directory on your C drive named MyFolder that contains various `*.txt` files (named whatever you wish). The following console application will monitor the `*.txt` files within the MyFolder and print out messages in the event that the files are created, deleted, modified, or renamed:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     Console.WriteLine("***** The Amazing File Watcher App *****\n");

     // Establish the path to the directory to watch.
     FileSystemWatcher watcher = new FileSystemWatcher();
     try{
          watcher.Path = @"C:\MyFolder";
     }
     catch(ArgumentException ex) {
          Console.WriteLine(ex.Message);
          return;
     }
```

```
    // Set up the things to be on the
    // lookout for.
    watcher.NotifyFilter = NotifyFilters.LastAccess
         | NotifyFilters.LastWrite
         | NotifyFilters.FileName
         | NotifyFilters.DirectoryName;

    // Only watch text files.
    watcher.Filter = "*.txt";

    // Add event handlers.
    watcher.Changed += new FileSystemEventHandler(OnChanged);
    watcher.Created += new FileSystemEventHandler(OnChanged);
    watcher.Deleted += new FileSystemEventHandler(OnChanged);
    watcher.Renamed += new RenamedEventHandler(OnRenamed);

    // Begin watching the directory.
    watcher.EnableRaisingEvents = true;

    // Wait for the user to quit the program.
    Console.WriteLine(@"Press 'q' to quit app.");
    while(Console.Read()!='q');
}
```

The two event handlers simply print out the current file modification:

```
static void OnChanged(object source, FileSystemEventArgs e)
{
    // Specify what is done when a file is changed, created, or deleted.
    Console.WriteLine("File: {0} {1}!", e.FullPath, e.ChangeType);
}

static void OnRenamed(object source, RenamedEventArgs e)
{
    // Specify what is done when a file is renamed.
    Console.WriteLine("File: {0} renamed to\n{1}", e.OldFullPath, e.FullPath);
}
```

To test this program, run the application and open Windows Explorer. Try renaming your files, creating a `*.txt` file, deleting a `*.txt` file, or whatnot. You will see the console application print out various bits of information regarding the state of the text files within MyFolder (see Figure 16-10).



Figure 16-10. *Watching some text files*

■ **Source Code** The MyDirectoryWatcher application is included under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Performing Asynchronous File I/O

To conclude our examination of the `System.IO` namespace, let's see how to interact with `FileStream` types asynchronously. You have already seen the asynchronous support provided by the .NET Framework during the examination of multithreading (see Chapter 14). Because I/O can be a lengthy task, all types deriving from `System.IO.Stream` inherit a set of methods that enable asynchronous processing of the data. As you would expect, these methods work in conjunction with the `IAsyncResult` type:

```
public abstract class System.IO.Stream :
    MarshalByRefObject,
    IDisposable
{
...
    public virtual IAsyncResult BeginRead(byte[] buffer, int offset,
        int count, AsyncCallback callback, object state);
    public virtual IAsyncResult BeginWrite(byte[] buffer, int offset,
        int count, AsyncCallback callback, object state);

    public virtual int EndRead(IAsyncResult asyncResult);
    public virtual void EndWrite(IAsyncResult asyncResult);
}
```

The process of working with the asynchronous behavior of `Stream`-derived types is identical to working with asynchronous delegates and asynchronous remote method invocations. While it's unlikely that asynchronous behaviors will greatly improve file access, other streams (e.g., socket based) are much more likely to benefit from asynchronous handling. In any case, the following example illustrates one manner in which you can asynchronously interact with a `FileStream` type:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Main thread started. ThreadID = {0}",
            Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

        // Must use this ctor to get a FileStream with asynchronous
        // read or write access.
        FileStream fs = new FileStream("logfile.txt", FileMode.Append,
            FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None, 4096, true);

        string msg = "this is a test";
        byte[] buffer = Encoding.ASCII.GetBytes(msg);

        // Start the asynchronous write. WriteDone invoked when finished.
        // Note that the FileStream object is passed as state info to the
        // callback method.
        fs.BeginWrite(buffer, 0, buffer.Length,
            new AsyncCallback(WriteDone), fs);
    }
```

```
    private static void WriteDone(IAsyncResult ar)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("AsyncCallback method on ThreadID = {0}",
            Thread.CurrentThread.GetHashCode());

        Stream s = (Stream)ar.AsyncState;
        s.EndWrite(ar);
        s.Close();
    }
}
```

The only point of interest in this example (assuming you recall the process of working with delegates!) is that in order to enable the asynchronous behavior of the `FileStream` type, you must make use of a specific constructor (shown here). The final `System.Boolean` parameter (when set to true) informs the `FileStream` object to perform its work on a secondary thread of execution.

■ **Source Code** The AsyncFileStream application is included under the Chapter 16 subdirectory.

Summary

This chapter began by examining the use of the `Directory(Info)` and `File(Info)` types (including several new members of the `File` type brought about with .NET 2.0). As you learned, these classes allow you to manipulate a physical file or directory on your hard drive. Next, you examined a number of types derived from the abstract `Stream` class, specifically `FileStream`. Given that `Stream`-derived types operate on a raw stream of bytes, the `System.IO` namespace provides numerous reader/writer types (`StreamWriter`, `StringWriter`, `BinaryWriter`, etc.) that simplify the process.

Along the way, you also checked out a new I/O-centric type provided by .NET 2.0 (`DriveType`), and you learned how to monitor files using the `FileSystemWatcher` type and how to interact with streams in an asynchronous manner.

CHAPTER 17

Understanding Object Serialization

In Chapter 16, you learned about the functionality provided by the `System.IO` namespace. As shown, this namespace provides numerous reader/writer types that can be used to persist data to a given location (in a given format). This chapter examines the related topic of *object serialization*. Using object serialization, you are able to persist and retrieve the state of an object to (or from) any `System.IO.Stream`-derived type.

As you might imagine, the ability to serialize types is critical when attempting to copy an object to a remote machine (the subject of the next chapter). Understand, however, that serialization is quite useful in its own right and will likely play a role in many of your .NET applications (distributed or not). Over the course of this chapter, you will be exposed to numerous aspects of the .NET serialization scheme, including a set of new attributes introduced with .NET 2.0 that allow you to customize the process.

Understanding Object Serialization

The term *serialization* describes the process of persisting (and possibly transferring) the state of an object to a stream. The persisted data sequence contains all necessary information needed to reconstruct (or *deserialize*) the state of the object for use later. Using this technology, it is trivial to save vast amounts of data (in various formats) with minimal fuss and bother. In fact, in many cases, saving application data using serialization services is much less cumbersome than making direct use of the readers/writers found within the `System.IO` namespace.

For example, assume you have created a GUI-based desktop application and wish to provide a way for end users to save their preferences. To do so, you might define a class named `UserPrefs` that encapsulates 20 or so pieces of field data. If you were to make use of a `System.IO.BinaryWriter` type, you would need to *manually* save each field of the `UserPrefs` object. Likewise, when you wish to load the data from file back into memory, you would need to make use of a `System.IO.BinaryReader` and (once again) *manually* read in each value to reconfigure a new `UserPrefs` object.

While this is certainly doable, you would save yourself a good amount of time simply by marking the `UserPrefs` class with the `[Serializable]` attribute. In this case, the entire state of the object can be persisted out using a few lines of code:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Assume UserPrefs has been marked [Serializable].
     UserPrefs userData= new UserPrefs();
     userData.WindowColor = "Yellow";
     userData.FontSize = "50";
     userData.IsPowerUser = false;
```

```
    // Now save object to a file named user.dat.
    BinaryFormatter binFormat = new BinaryFormatter();
    Stream fStream = new FileStream("user.dat",
        FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
    binFormat.Serialize(fStream, userData);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

While it is quite simple to persist objects using .NET object serialization, the processes used behind the scenes are quite sophisticated. For example, when an object is persisted to a stream, all associated data (base classes, contained objects, etc.) are automatically serialized as well. Therefore, if you are attempting to persist a derived class, all data up the chain of inheritance comes along for the ride. As you will see, a set of interrelated objects is represented using an object graph.

.NET serialization services also allow you to persist an object graph in a variety of formats. The previous code example made use of the `BinaryFormatter` type; therefore, the state of the `UserPrefs` object was persisted as a compact binary format. You are also able to persist an object graph into a Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) or XML format using other types. These formats can be quite helpful when you wish to ensure that your persisted objects travel well across operating systems, languages, and architectures.

Finally, understand that an object graph can be persisted into *any* `System.IO.Stream`-derived type. In the previous example, you persisted a `UserPrefs` object into a local file via the `FileStream` type. However, if you would rather persist an object to memory, you could make use of a `MemoryStream` type instead. All that matters is the fact that the sequence of data correctly represents the state of objects within the graph.

The Role of Object Graphs

As mentioned, when an object is serialized, the CLR will account for all related objects. The set of related objects is collectively referred to as an *object graph*. Object graphs provide a simple way to document how a set of objects refer to each other and do not necessarily map to classic OO relationships (such as the "is-a" or "has-a" relationship), although they do model this paradigm quite well.

Each object in an object graph is assigned a unique numerical value. Keep in mind that the numbers assigned to the members in an object graph are arbitrary and have no real meaning to the outside world. Once all objects have been assigned a numerical value, the object graph can record each object's set of dependencies.

As a simple example, assume you have created a set of classes that model some automobiles (of course). You have a base class named `Car`, which "has-a" `Radio`. Another class named `JamesBondCar` extends the `Car` base type. Figure 17-1 shows a possible object graph that models these relationships.

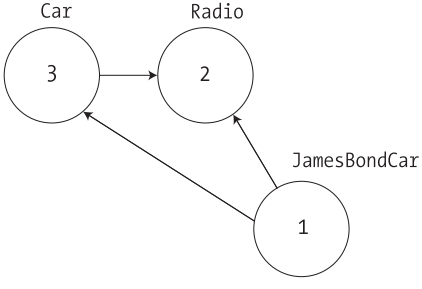


Figure 17-1. A simple object graph

When reading object graphs, you can use the phrase "depends on" or "refers to" when connecting the arrows. Thus, in Figure 17-1 you can see that the `Car` class refers to the `Radio` class (given the "has-a" relationship). `JamesBondCar` refers to `Car` (given the "is-a" relationship) as well as `Radio` (as it inherits this protected member variable).

Of course, the CLR does not paint pictures in memory to represent a graph of related objects. Rather, the relationship documented in the previous diagram is represented by a more mathematical formula that looks something like this:

```
[Car 3, ref 2], [Radio 2], [JamesBondCar 1, ref 3, ref 2]
```

If you parse this formula, you can again see that object 3 (the `Car`) has a dependency on object 2 (the `Radio`). Object 2, the `Radio`, is a lone wolf and requires nobody. Finally, object 1 (the `JamesBondCar`) has a dependency on object 3 as well as object 2. In any case, when you serialize or deserialize an instance of `JamesBondCar`, the object graph ensures that the `Radio` and `Car` types also participate in the process.

The beautiful thing about the serialization process is that the graph representing the relationships among your objects is established automatically behind the scenes. As you will see later in this chapter, however, if you do wish to become more involved in the construction of a given object graph, it is possible to do so.

Configuring Objects for Serialization

To make an object available to .NET serialization services, all you need to do is decorate each related class with the `[Serializable]` attribute. That's it (really). If you determine that a given class has some member data that should not (or perhaps cannot) participate in the serialization scheme, you can mark such fields with the `[NonSerialized]` attribute. This can be helpful if you have member variables in a serializable class that do not need to be "remembered" (e.g., fixed values, random values, transient data, etc.) and you wish to reduce the size of the persisted graph.

To get the ball rolling, here is the `Radio` class, which has been marked `[Serializable]`, excluding a single member variable (`radioID`) that has been marked `[NonSerialized]` and will therefore not be persisted into the specified data stream:

```
[Serializable]
public class Radio
{
    public bool hasTweeters;
    public bool hasSubWoofers;
    public double[] stationPresets;

    [NonSerialized]
    public string radioID = "XF-552RR6";
}
```

The `JamesBondCar` class and `Car` base class are also marked `[Serializable]` and define the following pieces of field data:

```
[Serializable]
public class Car
{
    public Radio theRadio = new Radio();
    public bool isHatchBack;
}
```

```
[Serializable]
public class JamesBondCar : Car
{
    public bool canFly;
    public bool canSubmerge;
}
```

Be aware that the [Serializable] attribute cannot be inherited. Therefore, if you derive a class from a type marked [Serializable], the child class must be marked [Serializable] as well, or it cannot be persisted. In fact, all objects in an object graph must be marked with the [Serializable] attribute. If you attempt to serialize a nonserializable object using the BinaryFormatter or SoapFormatter, you will receive a SerializationException at runtime.

Public Fields, Private Fields, and Public Properties

Notice that in each of these classes, I have defined the field data as public, just to simplify the example. Of course, private data exposed using public properties would be preferable from an OO point of view. Also, for the sake of simplicity, I have not defined any custom constructors on these types, and therefore all unassigned field data will receive the expected default values.

OO design principles aside, you may wonder how the various formatters expect a type's field data to be defined in order to be serialized into a stream. The answer is, it depends. If you are persisting an object using the BinaryFormatter, it makes absolutely no difference. This type is programmed to serialize *all* serializable fields of a type, regardless of whether they are public fields, private fields, or private fields exposed through type properties. The situation is quite different if you make use of the XmlSerializer or SoapFormatter type, however. These types will *only* serialize public pieces of field data or private data exposed through public properties.

Do recall, however, that if you have points of data that you do not want to be persisted into the object graph, you can selectively mark public or private fields as [NonSerialized], as done with the string field of the Radio type.

Choosing a Serialization Formatter

Once you have configured your types to participate in the .NET serialization scheme, your next step is to choose which format should be used when persisting your object graph. As of .NET 2.0, you have three choices out of the box:

- BinaryFormatter
- SoapFormatter
- XmlSerializer

The BinaryFormatter type serializes your object graph to a stream using a compact binary format. This type is defined within the System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Binary namespace that is part of mscorlib.dll. Therefore, to serialize your objects using a binary format, all you need to do is specify the following C# using directive:

```
// Gain access to the BinaryFormatter in mscorlib.dll.
using System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Binary;
```

The SoapFormatter type represents your graph as a SOAP message. This type is defined within the System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Soap namespace that is defined within a *separate assembly*. Thus, to format your object graph into a SOAP message, you must set a reference to System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Soap.dll and specify the following C# using directive:

```
// Must reference System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Soap.dll!
using System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Soap;
```

Finally, if you wish to persist an object graph as an XML document, you will need to specify that you are using the `System.Xml.Serialization` namespace, which is also defined in a separate assembly: `System.Xml.dll`. As luck would have it, all Visual Studio 2005 project templates automatically reference `System.Xml.dll`, therefore you will simply need to use the following namespace:

```
// Defined within System.Xml.dll.
using System.Xml.Serialization;
```

The IFormatter and IRemotingFormatting Interfaces

Regardless of which formatter you choose to make use of, be aware that each of them derives directly from `System.Object`, and therefore they do not share a common set of members from a serialization-centric base class. However, the `BinaryFormatter` and `SoapFormatter` types do support common members through the implementation of the `IFormatter` and `IRemotingFormatter` interfaces (of which `XmlSerializer` implements neither).

`System.Runtime.Serialization.IFormatter` defines the core `Serialize()` and `Deserialize()` methods, which do the grunt work to move your object graphs into and out of a specific stream. Beyond these members, `IFormatter` defines a few properties that are used behind the scenes by the implementing type:

```
public interface IFormatter
{
    SerializationBinder Binder { get; set; }
    StreamingContext Context { get; set; }
    ISurrogateSelector SurrogateSelector { get; set; }
    object Deserialize(System.IO.Stream serializationStream);
    void Serialize(System.IO.Stream serializationStream, object graph);
}
```

The `System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging.IRemotingFormatter` interface (which is leveraged internally by the .NET remoting layer) overloads the `Serialize()` and `Deserialize()` members into a manner more appropriate for distributed persistence. Note that `IRemotingFormatter` derives from the more general `IFormatter` interface:

```
public interface IRemotingFormatter  : IFormatter
{
     object Deserialize(Stream serializationStream,
          HeaderHandler handler);
     void Serialize(Stream serializationStream, object graph,
          Header[] headers);
}
```

Although you may not need to directly interact with these interfaces for most of your serialization endeavors, recall that interface-based polymorphism allows you to hold an instance of `BinaryFormatter` or `SoapFormatter` using an `IFormatter` reference. Therefore, if you wish to build a method that can serialize an object graph using either of these classes, you could write the following:

```
static void SerializeObjectGraph(IFormatter itfFormat,
    Stream destStream, object graph)
{
    itfFormat.Serialize(destStream, graph);
}
```

Type Fidelity Among the Formatters

The most obvious difference among the three formatters is how the object graph is persisted to stream (binary, SOAP, or pure XML). You should be aware of a few more subtle points of distinction, specifically how the formatters contend with *type fidelity*. When you make use of the `BinaryFormatter` type, it will not only persist the field data of the objects in the object graph, but also each type's fully qualified name and the full name of the defining assembly. These extra points of data make the `BinaryFormatter` an ideal choice when you wish to transport objects by value (e.g., as a full copy) across machine boundaries (see Chapter 18). As noted, to achieve this level of type fidelity, the `BinaryFormatter` will account for all field data of a type (public or private).

The `SoapFormatter` and `XmlSerializer`, on the other hand, do *not* attempt to preserve full type fidelity and therefore do not record the type's fully qualified name or assembly of origin, and only persist public field data/public properties. While this may seem like a limitation at first glance, the reason has to do with the open-ended nature of XML data representation. If you wish to persist object graphs that can be used by any operating system (Windows XP, Mac OS X, and *nix distributions), application framework (.NET, J2EE, COM, etc.), or programming language, you do not want to maintain full type fidelity, as you cannot assume all possible recipients can understand .NET-specific data types. Given this, `SoapFormatter` and `XmlSerializer` are ideal choices when you wish to ensure as broad a reach as possible for the persisted object graph.

Serializing Objects Using the BinaryFormatter

To illustrate how easy it is to persist an instance of the `JamesBondCar` to a physical file, let's make use of the `BinaryFormatter` type. Again, the two key methods of the `BinaryFormatter` type to be aware of are `Serialize()` and `Deserialize()`:

- `Serialize()`: Persists an object graph to a specified stream as a sequence of bytes
- `Deserialize()`: Converts a persisted sequence of bytes to an object graph

Assume you have created an instance of `JamesBondCar`, modified some state data, and want to persist your spymobile into a `*.dat` file. The first task is to create the `*.dat` file itself. This can be achieved by creating an instance of the `System.IO.FileStream` type (see Chapter 16). At this point, simply create an instance of the `BinaryFormatter` and pass in the `FileStream` and object graph to persist:

```
using System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Binary;
using System.IO;
...
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Object Serialization *****\n");

    // Make a JamesBondCar and set state.
    JamesBondCar jbc = new JamesBondCar();
    jbc.canFly = true;
    jbc.canSubmerge = false;
    jbc.theRadio.stationPresets = new double[]{89.3, 105.1, 97.1};
    jbc.theRadio.hasTweeters = true;

    // Save object to a file named CarData.dat in binary.
    BinaryFormatter binFormat = new BinaryFormatter();
    Stream fStream = new FileStream("CarData.dat",
            FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
```

```
    binFormat.Serialize(fStream, jbc);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

As you can see, the `BinaryFormatter.Serialize()` method is the member responsible for composing the object graph and moving the byte sequence to some `Stream`-derived type. In this case, the stream happens to be a physical file. However, you could also serialize your object types to any `Stream`-derived type such as a memory location, given that `MemoryStream` is a descendent of the `Stream` type.

Deserializing Objects Using the BinaryFormatter

Now suppose you want to read the persisted `JamesBondCar` from the binary file back into an object variable. Once you have programmatically opened `CarData.dat` (via the `File.OpenRead()` method), simply call the `Deserialize()` method of the `BinaryFormatter`. Be aware that `Deserialize()` returns a generic `System.Object` type, so you need to impose an explicit cast, as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Read the JamesBondCar from the binary file.
    fStream = File.OpenRead("CarData.dat");
    JamesBondCar carFromDisk =
        (JamesBondCar)binFormat.Deserialize(fStream);
    Console.WriteLine("Can this car fly? : {0}", carFromDisk.canFly);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Notice that when you call `Deserialize()`, you pass the `Stream`-derived type that represents the location of the persisted object graph (again, a file stream in this case). Now if that is not painfully simple, I'm not sure what is. In a nutshell, mark each class you wish to persist to a stream with the `[Serializable]` attribute. After this point, use the `BinaryFormatter` type to move your object graph to and from a binary stream. At this point, you can view the binary image that represents this instance of the `JamesBondCar` (see Figure 17-2).

CarData.dat

```
00000000  00 01 00 00 00 FF FF FF  FF 01 00 00 00 00 00 00  ................
00000010  00 0C 02 00 00 00 4A 53  69 6D 70 6C 65 53 65 72  ......JSimpleSer
00000020  69 61 6C 69 7A 61 74 69  6F 6E 2C 20 56 65 72 73  ialization, Vers
00000030  69 6F 6E 3D 31 2E 30 2E  30 2E 30 2C 20 43 75 6C  ion=1.0.0.0, Cul
00000040  74 75 72 65 3D 6E 65 75  74 72 61 6C 2C 20 50 75  ture=neutral, Pu
00000050  62 6C 69 63 4B 65 79 54  6F 6B 65 6E 3D 6E 75 6C  blicKeyToken=nul
00000060  6C 05 01 00 00 00 20 53  69 6D 70 6C 65 53 65 72  l..... SimpleSer
00000070  69 61 6C 69 7A 61 74 69  6F 6E 2E 4A 61 6D 65 73  ialization.James
00000080  42 6F 6E 64 43 61 72 04  00 00 00 06 63 61 6E 46  BondCar.....canF
00000090  6C 79 0B 63 61 6E 53 75  62 6D 65 72 67 65 08 74  ly.canSubmerge.t
000000a0  68 65 52 61 64 69 6F 0B  69 73 48 61 74 63 68 42  heRadio.isHatchB
000000b0  61 63 6B 00 00 04 00 01  01 19 53 69 6D 70 6C 65  ack.......Simple
000000c0  53 65 72 69 61 6C 69 7A  61 74 69 6F 6E 2E 52 61  Serialization.Ra
000000d0  64 69 6F 02 00 00 00 01  02 00 00 00 01 00 09 03  dio.............
000000e0  00 00 00 00 05 03 00 00  00 19 53 69 6D 70 6C 65  ..........Simple
000000f0  53 65 72 69 61 6C 69 7A  61 74 69 6F 6E 2E 52 61  Serialization.Ra
00000100  64 69 6F 03 00 00 00 0B  68 61 73 54 77 65 65 74  dio.....hasTweet
00000110  65 72 73 0D 68 61 73 53  75 62 57 6F 6F 66 65 72  ers.hasSubWoofer
00000120  73 0E 73 74 61 74 69 6F  6E 50 72 65 73 65 74 73  s.stationPresets
00000130  00 00 07 01 01 06 02 00  00 00 01 00 09 04 00 00  ................
00000140  00 0F 04 00 00 00 03 00  00 00 06 33 33 33 33 33  ...........33333
00000150  53 56 40 66 66 66 66 66  46 5A 40 66 66 66 66 66  SV@fffffFZ@fffff
00000160  46 58 40 0B                                       FX@.
```

Figure 17-2. `JamesBondCar` *serialized using a* `BinaryFormatter`

Serializing Objects Using the SoapFormatter

Your next choice of formatter is the `SoapFormatter` type. The `SoapFormatter` will persist an object graph into a SOAP message, which makes this formatter a solid choice when you wish to distribute objects remotely using the HTTP protocol. If you are unfamiliar with the SOAP specification, don't sweat the details right now. In a nutshell, SOAP defines a standard process in which methods may be invoked in a platform- and OS-neutral manner (we'll examine SOAP in a bit more detail in the final chapter of this book during a discussion of XML web services).

Assuming you have set a reference to the `System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Soap.dll` assembly, you could persist and retrieve a `JamesBondCar` as a SOAP message simply by replacing each occurrence of `BinaryFormatter` with `SoapFormatter`. Consider the following code, which serializes an object to a local file named `CarData.soap`:

```
using System.Runtime.Serialization.Formatters.Soap;
...
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Save object to a file named CarData.soap in SOAP format.
    SoapFormatter soapFormat = new SoapFormatter();
    fStream = new FileStream("CarData.soap",
    FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
        soapFormat.Serialize(fStream, jbc);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

As before, simply use `Serialize()` and `Deserialize()` to move the object graph in and out of the stream. If you open the resulting `*.soap` file, you can locate the XML elements that mark the stateful values of the current `JamesBondCar` as well as the relationship between the objects in the graph via the `#ref` tokens. Consider the following end result (XML namespaces snipped for brevity):

```
<SOAP-ENV:Envelope xmlns:xsi="...">
    <SOAP-ENV:Body>
        <a1:JamesBondCar id="ref-1" xmlns:a1="...">
            <canFly>true</canFly>
            <canSubmerge>false</canSubmerge>
            <theRadio href="#ref-3"/>
            <isHatchBack>false</isHatchBack>
        </a1:JamesBondCar>
        <a1:Radio id="ref-3" xmlns:a1="...">
            <hasTweeters>true</hasTweeters>
            <hasSubWoofers>false</hasSubWoofers>
            <stationPresets href="#ref-4"/>
        </a1:Radio>
        <SOAP-ENC:Array id="ref-4" SOAP-ENC:arrayType="xsd:double[3]">
            <item>89.3</item>
            <item>105.1</item>
            <item>97.1</item>
        </SOAP-ENC:Array>
    </SOAP-ENV:Body>
</SOAP-ENV:Envelope>
```

Serializing Objects Using the XmlSerializer

In addition to the SOAP and binary formatters, the `System.Xml.dll` assembly provides a third formatter, `System.Xml.Serialization.XmlSerializer`, which can be used to persist the state of a given object as pure XML, as opposed to XML data wrapped within a SOAP message. Working with this type is a bit different from working with the `SoapFormatter` or `BinaryFormatter` type. Consider the following code:

```
using System.Xml.Serialization;
...
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Save object to a file named CarData.xml in XML format.
     XmlSerializer xmlFormat = new XmlSerializer(typeof(JamesBondCar),
          new Type[] { typeof(Radio), typeof(Car) });

     fStream = new FileStream("CarData.xml",
          FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
     xmlFormat.Serialize(fStream, jbc);
     fStream.Close();
...
}
```

The key difference is that the `XmlSerializer` type requires you to specify type information that represents the items in the object graph. Notice that the first constructor argument of the `XmlSerializer` defines the root element of the XML file, while the second argument is an array of `System.Type` types that hold metadata regarding the subelements. If you were to look within the newly generated `CarData.xml` file, you would find the following (abbreviated) XML data:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<JamesBondCar xmlns:xsi="...">
  <theRadio>
    <hasTweeters>true</hasTweeters>
    <hasSubWoofers>false</hasSubWoofers>
    <stationPresets>
      <double>89.3</double>
      <double>105.1</double>
      <double>97.1</double>
    </stationPresets>
  </theRadio>
  <isHatchBack>false</isHatchBack>
  <canFly>true</canFly>
  <canSubmerge>false</canSubmerge>
</JamesBondCar>
```

■ **Note** The `XmlSerializer` demands that all serialized types in the object graph support a default constructor (so be sure to add it back if you define custom constructors). If this is not the case, you will receive an `InvalidOperationException` at runtime.

Controlling the Generated XML Data

If you have a background in XML technologies, you are well aware that it is often critical to ensure the elements within an XML document conform to a set of rules that establish the "validity" of the data. Understand that a "valid" XML document does not have to do with the syntactic well-being of

the XML elements (e.g., all opening elements must have a closing element). Rather, valid documents conform to agreed-upon formatting rules (e.g., field X must be an expressed as an attribute and not a subelement), which are typically defined by an XML schema or document-type definition (DTD) file.

By default, all field data of a `[Serializable]` type is formatted as elements rather than XML attributes. If you wish to control how the `XmlSerializer` generates the resulting XML document, you may decorate your `[Serializable]` types with any number of additional attributes from the `System.Xml.Serialization` namespace. Table 17-1 documents some (but not all) of the attributes that influence how XML data is encoded to a stream.

Table 17-1. *Serialization-centric Attributes of the* `System.Xml.Serialization` *Namespace*

Attribute	Meaning in Life
`XmlAttributeAttribute`	The member will be serialized as an XML attribute.
`XmlElementAttribute`	The field or property will be serialized as an XML element.
`XmlEnumAttribute`	The element name of an enumeration member.
`XmlRootAttribute`	This attribute controls how the root element will be constructed (namespace and element name).
`XmlTextAttribute`	The property or field should be serialized as XML text.
`XmlTypeAttribute`	The name and namespace of the XML type.

By way of a simple example, first consider how the field data of `JamesBondCar` is currently persisted as XML:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<JamesBondCar xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
  xmlns:xsd="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema">
...
  <canFly>true</canFly>
  <canSubmerge>false</canSubmerge>
</JamesBondCar>
```

If you wished to specify a custom XML namespace that qualifies the `JamesBondCar` as well as encodes the `canFly` and `canSubmerge` values as XML attributes, you can do so by modifying the C# definition of `JamesBondCar` as so:

```
[Serializable,
XmlRoot(Namespace = "http://www.intertechtraining.com")]
public class JamesBondCar : Car
{
...
    [XmlAttribute]
    public bool canFly;
    [XmlAttribute]
    public bool canSubmerge;
}
```

This would yield the following XML document (note the opening `<JamesBondCar>` element):

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<JamesBondCar xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
    xmlns:xsd="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    canFly="true" canSubmerge="false"
    xmlns="http://www.intertechtraining.com">
...
</JamesBondCar>
```

Of course, there are numerous other attributes that can be used to control how the `XmlSerializer` generates the resulting XML document. If you wish to see all of your options, look up the `System.Xml.Serialization` namespace using the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Persisting Collections of Objects

Now that you have seen how to persist a single object to a stream, let's examine how to save a set of objects. As you may have noticed, the `Serialize()` method of the `IFormatter` interface does not provide a way to specify an arbitrary number of objects (only a single `System.Object`). On a related note, the return value of `Deserialize()` is, again, a single `System.Object`:

```
public interface IFormatter
{
...
    object Deserialize(System.IO.Stream serializationStream);
    void Serialize(System.IO.Stream serializationStream, object graph);
}
```

Recall that the `System.Object` in fact represents a complete object graph. Given this, if you pass in an object that has been marked as `[Serializable]` and contains other `[Serializable]` objects, the entire set of objects is persisted right away. As luck would have it, most of the types found within the `System.Collections` and `System.Collections.Generic` namespaces have already been marked as `[Serializable]`. Therefore, if you wish to persist a set of objects, simply add the set to the container (such as an `ArrayList` or `List<>`) and serialize the object to your stream of choice.

Assume you have updated the `JamesBondCar` class with a two-argument constructor to set a few pieces of state data (note that you add back the default constructor as required by the `XmlSerializer`):

```
[Serializable,
XmlRoot(Namespace = "http://www.intertechtraining.com")]
public class JamesBondCar : Car
{
    public JamesBondCar(bool skyWorthy, bool seaWorthy)
    {
        canFly = skyWorthy;
        canSubmerge = seaWorthy;
    }
    // The XmlSerializer demands a default constructor!
    public JamesBondCar(){}
...
}
```

With this, you are not able to persist any number of `JamesBondCars` as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Now persist a List<> of JamesBondCars.
     List<JamesBondCar> myCars = new List<JamesBondCar>();
     myCars.Add(new JamesBondCar(true, true));
     myCars.Add(new JamesBondCar(true, false));
     myCars.Add(new JamesBondCar(false, true));
     myCars.Add(new JamesBondCar(false, false));

     fStream = new FileStream("CarCollection.xml",
          FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
```

```
    xmlFormat = new XmlSerializer(typeof(List<JamesBondCar>),
        new Type[] { typeof(JamesBondCar), typeof(Car), typeof(Radio) });
    xmlFormat.Serialize(fStream, myCars);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Again, because you made use of the `XmlSerializer`, you are required to specify type information for each of the subobjects within the root object (which in this case is the `ArrayList`). Had you made use of the `BinaryFormatter` or `SoapFormatter` type, the logic would be even more straightforward, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    ...
    // Save ArrayList object (myCars) as binary.
    List<JamesBondCar> myCars = new List<JamesBondCar>();

    ...
    BinaryFormatter binFormat = new BinaryFormatter();
    Stream fStream = new FileStream("AllMyCars.dat",
        FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
    binFormat.Serialize(fStream, myCars);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Excellent! At this point, you should see how you can use object serialization services to simplify the process of persisting and resurrecting your application's data. Next up, allow me to illustrate how you can customize the default serialization process.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleSerialize application is located under the Chapter 17 subdirectory.

Customizing the Serialization Process

In a vast majority of cases, the default serialization scheme provided by the .NET platform will be exactly what you require. Simply apply the `[Serializable]` attribute and pass the object graph to your formatter of choice. In some cases, however, you may wish to become more involved with how an object graph is handled during the serialization process. For example, maybe you have a business rule that says all field data must be persisted in uppercase format, or perhaps you wish to add additional bits of data to the stream that do not directly map to fields in the object being persisted (time stamps, unique identifiers, or whatnot).

When you wish to become more involved with the process of object serialization, the `System.Runtime.Serialization` namespace provides several types that allow you to do so. Table 17-2 describes some of the core types to be aware of.

Table 17-2. `System.Runtime.Serialization` *Namespace Core Types*

Type	Meaning in Life
`ISerializable`	As of .NET 1.1, implementing this interface was the preferred way to perform custom serialization. As of .NET 2.0, the preferred way to customize the serialization process is to apply a new set of attributes (described in just a bit).
`ObjectIDGenerator`	This type generates IDs for members in an object graph.
`OnDeserializedAttribute`	This .NET 2.0 attribute allows you to specify a method that will be called immediately after the object has been deserialized.
`OnDeserializingAttribute`	This .NET 2.0 attribute allows you to specify a method that will be called during the deserialization process.
`OnSerializedAttribute`	This .NET 2.0 attribute allows you to specify a method that will be called immediately after the object has been serialized.
`OnSerializingAttribute`	This .NET 2.0 attribute allows you to specify a method that will be called during the serialization process.
`OptionalFieldAttribute`	This .NET 2.0 attribute allows you to define a field on a type that can be missing from the specified stream.
`SerializationInfo`	In essence, this class is a "property bag" that maintains name/value pairs representing the state of an object during the serialization process.

A Deeper Look at Object Serialization

Before we examine various ways in which you can customize the serialization process, it will be helpful to take a deeper look at what takes place behind the scenes. When the `BinaryFormatter` serializes an object graph, it is in charge of transmitting the following information into the specified stream:

- The fully qualified name of the objects in the graph (e.g., `MyApp.JamesBondCar`)
- The name of the assembly defining the object graph (e.g., `MyApp.exe`)
- An instance of the `SerializationInfo` class that contains all stateful data maintained by the members in the object graph

During the deserialization process, the `BinaryFormatter` uses this same information to build an identical copy of the object, using the information extracted from the underlying stream.

■ **Note** Recall that the `SoapFormatter` and `XmlSerializer` do not persist a type's fully qualified name or the name of the defining assembly. These types are concerned only with persisting exposed field data.

The big picture can be visualized as shown in Figure 17-3.

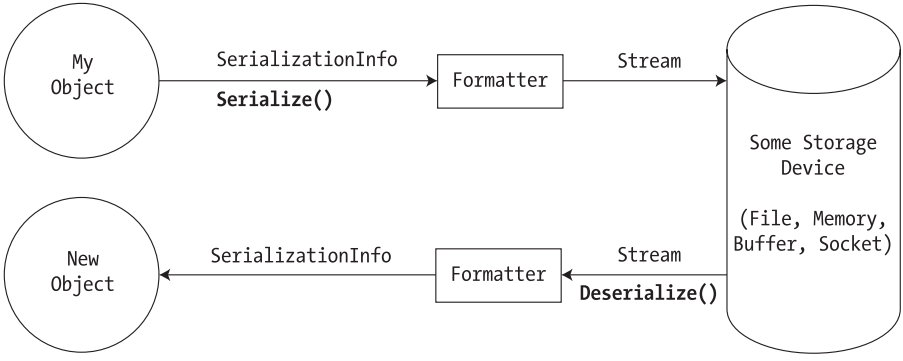


Figure 17-3. *The serialization process*

Beyond moving the required data into and out of a stream, formatters also analyze the members in the object graph for the following pieces of infrastructure:

- A check is made to determine whether the object is marked with the `[Serializable]` attribute. If the object is not, a `SerializationException` is thrown.
- If the object is marked `[Serializable]`, a check is made to determine if the object implements the `ISerializable` interface. If this is the case, `GetObjectData()` is called on the object.
- If the object does not implement `ISerializable`, the default serialization process is used, serializing all fields not marked as `[NonSerialized]`.

In addition to determining if the type supports `ISerializable`, formatters (as of .NET 2.0) are also responsible for discovering if the types in question support members that have been adorned with the `[OnSerializing]`, `[OnSerialized]`, `[OnDeserializing]`, or `[OnDeserialized]` attribute. We'll examine the role of these attributes in just a bit, but first let's look at the role of `ISerializable`.

Customizing Serialization Using ISerializable

Objects that are marked `[Serializable]` have the option of implementing the `ISerializable` interface. By doing so, you are able to "get involved" with the serialization process and perform any pre- or post-data formatting. This interface is quite simple, given that it defines only a single method, `GetObjectData()`:

```
// When you wish to tweak the serialization process,
// implement ISerializable.
public interface ISerializable
{
     void GetObjectData(SerializationInfo info,
          StreamingContext context);
}
```

The `GetObjectData()` method is called automatically by a given formatter during the serialization process. The implementation of this method populates the incoming `SerializationInfo` parameter with a series of name/value pairs that (typically) map to the field data of the object being persisted. `SerializationInfo` defines numerous variations on the overloaded `AddValue()` method, in addition to a small set of properties that allow the type to get and set the type's name, defining assembly, and member count. Here is a partial snapshot:

```
public sealed class SerializationInfo : object
{
     public SerializationInfo(Type type, IFormatterConverter converter);
     public string AssemblyName { get; set; }
     public string FullTypeName { get; set; }
     public int MemberCount { get; }
     public void AddValue(string name, short value);
     public void AddValue(string name, UInt16 value);
     public void AddValue(string name, int value);
...
}
```

Types that implement the `ISerializable` interface must also define a special constructor taking the following signature:

```
// You must supply a custom constructor with this signature
// to allow the runtime engine to set the state of your object.
[Serializable]
class SomeClass : ISerializable
{
     private SomeClass (SerializationInfo si, StreamingContext ctx) {...}
...
}
```

Notice that the visibility of this constructor is set as *private*. This is permissible given that the formatter will have access to this member regardless of its visibility. These special constructors tend to be marked as private to ensure that the casual object user would never create an object in this manner. As you can see, the first parameter of this constructor is an instance of the `SerializationInfo` type (seen previously).

The second parameter of this special constructor is a `StreamingContext` type, which contains information regarding the source or destination of the bits. The most informative member of this type is the `State` property, which represents a value from the `StreamingContextStates` enumeration. The values of this enumeration represent the basic composition of the current stream.

To be honest, unless you are implementing some low-level custom remoting services, you will seldom need to deal with this enumeration directly. Nevertheless, here are the possible names of the `StreamingContextStates` enum (consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details):

```
public enum StreamingContextStates
{
    CrossProcess,
    CrossMachine,
    File,
    Persistence,
    Remoting,
    Other,
    Clone,
    CrossAppDomain,
    All
}
```

To illustrate customizing the serialization process using `ISerializable`, assume you have a class type that defines two points of string data. Furthermore, assume that you must ensure the string values are serialized to the stream in all uppercase and deserialized from the stream in all lowercase. To account for such rules, you could implement `ISerializable` as so (be sure to "use" the `System.Runtime.Serialization` namespace):

```
[Serializable]
class MyStringData : ISerializable
{
    public string dataItemOne, dataItemTwo;

    public MyStringData(){}
    private MyStringData(SerializationInfo si, StreamingContext ctx)
    {
        // Rehydrate member variables from stream.
        dataItemOne = si.GetString("First_Item").ToLower();
        dataItemTwo = si.GetString("dataItemTwo").ToLower();
    }

    void ISerializable.GetObjectData(SerializationInfo info, StreamingContext ctx)
    {
        // Fill up the SerializationInfo object with the formatted data.
        info.AddValue("First_Item", dataItemOne.ToUpper());
        info.AddValue("dataItemTwo", dataItemTwo.ToUpper());
    }
}
```

Notice that when you are filling the `SerializationInfo` type from within the `GetObjectData()` method, you are *not* required to name the data points identically to the type's internal member variables. This can obviously be helpful if you need to further decouple the type's data from the persisted format. Do be aware, however, that you will need to obtain the values from within the private constructor using the same names assigned within `GetObjectData()`.

To test your customization, assume you have persisted an instance of `MyStringData` using a `SoapFormatter`. When you view the resulting `*.soap` file, you will note that the string fields have indeed been persisted in uppercase:

```
<SOAP-ENV:Envelope xmlns:xsi="...">
    <SOAP-ENV:Body>
        <a1:MyStringData id="ref-1" xmlns:a1="...">
            <First_Item id="ref-3">THIS IS SOME DATA.</First_Item>
            <dataItemTwo id="ref-4">HERE IS SOME MORE DATA</dataItemTwo>
        </a1:MyStringData>
    </SOAP-ENV:Body>
</SOAP-ENV:Envelope>
```

Customizing Serialization Using Attributes

Although implementing the `ISerializable` interface is still possible under .NET 2.0, the preferred manner to customize the serialization process is to define methods that are attributed with any of the new serialization-centric attributes (`[OnSerializing]`, `[OnSerialized]`, `[OnDeserializing]`, or `[OnDeserialized]`). Using these attributes is less cumbersome than implementing `ISerializable`, given that you do not need to manually interact with an incoming `SerializationInfo` parameter. Instead, you are able to directly modify your state data while the formatter is operating on the type.

When applying these attributes, the methods must be defined to receive a `StreamingContext` parameter and return nothing (otherwise, you will receive a runtime exception). Do note that you are not required to account for each of the serialization-centric attributes, and you can simply contend with the stages of serialization you are interested in intercepting. To illustrate, here is a new `[Serializable]` type that has the same requirements as `MyStringData`, this time accounted for using the `[OnSerializing]` and `[OnDeserialized]` attributes:

```
[Serializable]
class MoreData
{
    public string dataItemOne, dataItemTwo;

    [OnSerializing]
    internal void OnSerializing(StreamingContext context)
    {
        // Called during the serialization process.
        dataItemOne = dataItemOne.ToUpper();
        dataItemTwo = dataItemTwo.ToUpper();
    }

    [OnDeserialized]
    internal void OnDeserialized(StreamingContext context)
    {
        // Called once the deserialization process is complete.
        dataItemOne = dataItemOne.ToLower();
        dataItemTwo = dataItemTwo.ToLower();
    }
}
```

If you were to serialize this new type, you would again find that the data has been persisted as uppercase and deserialized as lowercase.

■ **Source Code** The CustomSerialization project is included under the Chapter 17 subdirectory.

Versioning Serializable Objects

To wrap up this chapter, the final topic to address is the process of versioning serializable objects. To understand why this may be necessary, consider the following scenario. Assume you have created the `UserPrefs` class (mentioned at the beginning of the chapter) as so:

```
[Serializable]
class UserPrefs
{
    public string objVersion = "1.0";
    public ConsoleColor BackgroundColor;
    public ConsoleColor ForegroundColor;

    public UserPrefs()
    {
        BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Black;
        ForegroundColor = ConsoleColor.Red;
    }
}
```

Now, assume you have an application that serializes an instance of this class using a `BinaryFormatter`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    UserPrefs up = new UserPrefs();
    up.BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.DarkBlue;
    up.ForegroundColor = ConsoleColor.White;
```

```
    // Save an instance of UserPrefs to file.
    BinaryFormatter binFormat = new BinaryFormatter();
    Stream fStream = new FileStream(@"C:\user.dat",
            FileMode.Create, FileAccess.Write, FileShare.None);
    binFormat.Serialize(fStream, up);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

At this point, an instance of `UserPrefs` (version 1.0) has been persisted to C:\user.dat. Now, what if you updated the definition of `UserPrefs` class with two new fields:

```
[Serializable]
class UserPrefs
{
    public string objVersion = "2.0";
    public ConsoleColor BackgroundColor;
    public ConsoleColor ForegroundColor;

    // New!
    public int BeepFreq;
    public string ConsoleTitle;

    public UserPrefs()
    {
        BeepFreq = 1000;
        ConsoleTitle = "My Console";
        BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Black;
        ForegroundColor = ConsoleColor.Red;
    }
}
```

Imagine this same application now attempts to deserialize the instance of the persisted `UserPrefs` object version 1.0 as so (note the previous serialization logic has been removed in order for this example to work):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Load an instance of UserPrefs (1.0) to memory?
    UserPrefs up = null;
    BinaryFormatter binFormat = new BinaryFormatter();
    Stream fStream = new FileStream(@"C:\user.dat",
       FileMode.Open, FileAccess.Read, FileShare.None);
    up = (UserPrefs)binFormat.Deserialize(fStream);
    fStream.Close();
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

You will find a runtime exception is thrown:

```
Unhandled Exception: System.Runtime.Serialization.SerializationException:
Member 'BeepFreq' in class ' VersionedObject.UserPrefs' is not present in the
serialized stream and is not marked with
System.Runtime.Serialization.OptionalFieldAttribute.
```

The problem is that the original `UserPrefs` object persisted to C:\user.dat did *not* have storage for the two new fields found in your updated class definition (`BeepFreq` and `ConsoleTitle`). Clearly, this is problematic, as it is quite natural for a serialized object to evolve over its lifetime.

Prior to .NET 2.0, the only way to account for the possibility that previously persisted objects may not have each and every field of the latest and greatest version of the class was to implement

ISerializable and take matters into your own hands. However, as of .NET 2.0, new fields can now be explicitly marked with the [OptionalField] attribute (found within the System.Runtime.Serialization namespace):

```
[Serializable]
class UserPrefs
{
    public ConsoleColor BackgroundColor;
    public ConsoleColor ForegroundColor;

    // New!
    [OptionalField]
    public int BeepFreq;
    [OptionalField]
    public string ConsoleTitle;

    public UserPrefs()
    {
        BeepFreq = 1000;
        ConsoleTitle = "My Console";
        BackgroundColor = ConsoleColor.Black;
        ForegroundColor = ConsoleColor.Red;
    }
}
```

When a formatter deserializes an object that does not contain fields such optional fields, it will no longer throw a runtime exception. Rather, the data that is preserved is mapped back into the existing fields (BackgroundColor and ForegroundColor, in this case), while the remaining fields are simply assigned their default values.

■ **Note** Understand that the use of [OptionalField] does not completely solve the process of versioning persisted objects. However, this attribute does provide a workaround for the most common headache of the versioning process (adding new field data). More elaborate versioning tasks may still require implementing the ISerializable interface.

■ **Source Code** The VersionedObject project is included under the Chapter 17 subdirectory.

Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of object serialization services. As you have seen, the .NET platform makes use of an object graph to correctly account for the full set of related objects that are to be persisted to a stream. As long as each member in the object graph has been marked with the [Serializable] attribute, the data is persisted using your format of choice (binary, SOAP, or XML).

You also learned that it is possible to customize the out-of-the-box serialization process using two possible approaches. First, you learned how to implement the ISerializable interface (and support a special private constructor) to become more involved with how formatters persist the supplied data. Next, you came to know a set of new attributes introduced with .NET 2.0, which simplifies the process of custom serialization. Just apply the [OnSerializing], [OnSerialized], [OnDeserializing], or [OnDeserialized] attribute on members taking a StreamingContext parameter, and the formatters will invoke them accordingly. The chapter wrapped up with an examination of a final attribute, [OptionalField], which can be used to gracefully version a serializable type.

CHAPTER 18

The .NET Remoting Layer

Developers who are new to the .NET platform often assume that .NET is all about building Internet-centric applications (given that the term ".NET" often conjures the notion of "interNET" software). As you have already seen, however, this is simply not the case. In fact, the construction of web-centric programs is simply one tiny (but quite well-touted) aspect of the .NET platform. In this same vein of misinformation, many new .NET developers tend to assume that XML web services are the only way to interact with remote objects. Again, this is not true. Using the .NET remoting layer, you are able to build peer-to-peer distributed applications that have nothing to do with HTTP or XML (if you so choose).

The first goal of this chapter is to examine the low-level grunge used by the CLR to move information between application boundaries. Along the way, you will come to understand the numerous terms used when discussing .NET remoting, such as proxies, channels, marshaling by reference (as opposed to by value), server-activated (versus client-activated) objects, and so forth. After these background elements are covered, the remainder of the chapter offers numerous code examples that illustrate the process of building distributed systems using the .NET platform.

Defining .NET Remoting

As you recall from your reading in Chapter 13, an *application domain* (*AppDomain*) is a logical boundary for a .NET assembly, which is itself housed within a Win32 process. Understanding this concept is critical when discussing distributed computing under .NET, given that *remoting* is nothing more than the act of two objects communicating across application domains. The two application domains in question could be physically configured in any of the following manners:

- Two application domains in the same process (and thus on the same machine)
- Two application domains in separate processes on the same machine
- Two application domains in separate processes on different machines

Given these three possibilities, you can see that remoting does not necessarily need to involve two networked computers. In fact, each of the examples presented in this chapter can be successfully run on a single, stand-alone machine. Regardless of the distance between two objects, it is common to refer to each agent using the terms "client" and "server." Simply put, the *client* is the entity that attempts to interact with remote objects. The *server* is the software agent that houses the remote objects.

The .NET Remoting Namespaces

Before we dive too deep into the details of the .NET remoting layer, we need to check out the functionality provided by the remoting-centric namespaces. The .NET base class libraries provide numerous namespaces that allow you to build distributed applications. The bulk of the types found within these namespaces are contained within `mscorlib.dll`, but the `System.Runtime.Remoting.dll` assembly does complement and extend the core namespaces. Table 18-1 briefly describes the role of the remoting-centric namespaces as of .NET 2.0.

Table 18-1. *.NET Remoting-centric Namespaces*

Namespace	Meaning in Life
`System.Runtime.Remoting`	This is the core namespace you must use when building any sort of distributed .NET application.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Activation`	This relatively small namespace defines a handful of types that allow you to fine-tune the process of activating a remote object.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels`	This namespace contains types that represent channels and channel sinks.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Http`	This namespace contains types that use the HTTP protocol to transport messages and objects to and from remote locations.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Ipc`	This namespace (which is new to .NET 2.0) contains types that leverage the Win32 interprocess communication (IPC) architecture. As you may know, IPC proves fast communications between AppDomains on the *same* physical machine.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Tcp`	This namespace contains types that use the TCP protocol to transport messages and objects to and from remote locations.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Contexts`	This namespace allows you to configure the details of an object's context.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime`	This namespace contains types that manage the lifetime of remote objects.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging`	This namespace contains types used to create and transmit message objects.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Metadata`	This namespace contains types that can be used to customize the generation and processing of SOAP formatting.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Metadata.W3cXsd2001`	Closely related to the previous namespace, this namespace contains types that represent the XML Schema Definition (XSD) defined by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in 2001.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.MetadataServices`	This namespace contains the types used by the `soapsuds.exe` command-line tool to convert .NET metadata to and from an XML schema for the remoting infrastructure.

Namespace	Meaning in Life
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Proxies`	This namespace contains types that provide functionality for proxy objects.
`System.Runtime.Remoting.Services`	This namespace defines a number of common base classes (and interfaces) that are typically only leveraged by other intrinsic remoting agents.

Understanding the .NET Remoting Framework

When clients and servers exchange information across application boundaries, the CLR makes use of several low-level primitives to ensure the entities in question are able to communicate with each other as transparently as possible. This means that as a .NET programmer, you are *not* required to provide reams and reams of grungy networking code to invoke a method on a remote object. Likewise, the server process is *not* required to manually pluck a network packet out of the queue and reformat the message into terms the remote object can understand. As you would hope, the CLR takes care of such details automatically using a default set of remoting primitives (although you are certainly able to get involved with the process if you so choose).

In a nutshell, the .NET remoting layer revolves around a careful orchestration that takes place between four key players:

- Proxies
- Messages
- Channels
- Formatters

Let's check out each entity in turn and see how their combined functionality facilitates remote method invocations.

Understanding Proxies and Messages

Clients and server objects do not communicate via a direct connection, but rather through the use of an intermediary termed a *proxy*. The role of a .NET proxy is to fool the client into believing it is communicating with the requested remote object in the *same application domain*. To facilitate this illusion, a proxy has the identical interface (i.e., members, properties, fields, and whatnot) as the remote type it represents. As far as the client is concerned, a given proxy *is* the remote object. Under the hood, however, the proxy is forwarding calls to the remote object.

Formally speaking, the proxy invoked directly by the client is termed the *transparent proxy*. This CLR autogenerated entity is in charge of ensuring that the client has provided the correct number of (and type of) parameters to invoke the remote method. Given this, you can regard the transparent proxy as a fixed interception layer that *cannot* be modified or extended programmatically.

Assuming the transparent proxy is able to verify the incoming arguments, this information is packaged up into another CLR-generated type termed the *message object*. By definition, all message objects implement the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging.IMessage` interface:

```
public interface IMessage
{
    IDictionary Properties { get; }
}
```

As you can see, the IMessage interface defines a single property (named Properties) that provides access to a collection used to hold the client-supplied arguments. Once this message object has been populated by the CLR, it is then passed into a closely related type termed the *real proxy*.

The real proxy is the entity that actually passes the message object into the channel (described momentarily). Unlike the transparent proxy, the real proxy *can* be extended by the programmer and is represented by a base class type named (of course) RealProxy. Again, it is worth pointing out that the CLR will always generate a default implementation of the client-side real proxy, which will serve your needs most (if not all) of the time. Nevertheless, to gain some insight into the functionality provided by the abstract RealProxy base class, ponder the formal definition type:

```
public abstract class RealProxy : object
{
    public virtual ObjRef CreateObjRef(Type requestedType);
    public virtual bool Equals(object obj);
    public virtual IntPtr GetCOMIUnknown(bool fIsMarshalled);
    public virtual int GetHashCode();
    public virtual void GetObjectData(SerializationInfo info,
         StreamingContext context);
    public Type GetProxiedType();
    public static object GetStubData(RealProxy rp);
    public virtual object GetTransparentProxy();
    public Type GetType();
    public IConstructionReturnMessage InitializeServerObject(
        IConstructionCallMessage ctorMsg);
    public virtual IMessage Invoke(IMessage msg);
    public virtual void SetCOMIUnknown(IntPtr i);
    public static void SetStubData(RealProxy rp, object stubData);
    public virtual IntPtr SupportsInterface(ref Guid iid);
    public virtual string ToString();
}
```

Unless you are interested in building a custom implementation of the client-side real proxy, the only member of interest is RealProxy.Invoke(). Under the hood, the CLR-generated transparent proxy passes the formatted message object into the RealProxy type via its Invoke() method.

Understanding Channels

Once the proxies have validated and formatted the client-supplied arguments into a message object, this IMessage-compatible type is passed from the real proxy into a channel object. *Channels* are the entities in charge of transporting a message to the remote object and, if necessary, ensuring that any member return value is passed from the remote object back to the client. The .NET 2.0 base class libraries provide three channel implementations out of the box:

- TCP channel
- HTTP channel
- IPC channel

The *TCP channel* is represented by the TcpChannel class type and is used to pass messages using the TCP/IP network protocol. TcpChannel is helpful in that the formatted packets are quite lightweight, given that the messages are converted into a tight binary format using a related BinaryFormatter (yes, the same BinaryFormatter you saw in Chapter 17). Use of the TcpChannel type tends to result in faster remote access. The downside is that TCP channels are not firewall-friendly and may require the services of a system administrator to allow messages to pass across machine boundaries.

In contrast, the *HTTP channel* is represented by the `HttpChannel` class type, which converts message objects into a SOAP format using a related SOAP formatter. As you have seen, SOAP is XML-based and thus tends to result in beefier payloads than the payloads used by the `TcpChannel` type. Given this, using the `HttpChannel` can result in slightly slower remote access. On the plus side, HTTP is far more firewall-friendly, given that most firewalls allow textual packets to be passed over port 80.

Finally, as of .NET 2.0, we have access to the *IPC channel*, represented by the `IpcChannel` type, which defines a communication channel for remoting using the IPC system of the Windows operating system. Because `IpcChannel` bypasses traditional network communication to cross AppDomains, the `IpcChannel` is much faster than the HTTP and TCP channels; however, it can be used only for communication between application domains *on the same physical computer*. Given this, you could never use `IpcChannel` to build a distributed application that spans multiple physical computers. `IpcChannel` can be an ideal option, however, when you wish to have two local programs share information in the fastest possible manner.

Regardless of which channel type you choose to use, understand that the `HttpChannel`, `TcpChannel`, and `IpcChannel` types all implement the `IChannel`, `IChannelSender`, and `IChannelReceiver` interfaces. The `IChannel` interface (as you will see in just a bit) defines a small set of members that provide common functionality to all channel types. The role of `IChannelSender` is to define a common set of members for channels that are able to send information *to* a specific receiver. On the other hand, `IChannelReceiver` defines a set of members that allow a channel to receive information *from* a given sender.

To allow the client and server applications to register their channel of choice, you will make use of the `ChannelServices.RegisterChannel()` method, which takes a type implementing `IChannel`. Just to preview things to come, the following code snippet illustrates how a server-side application domain can register an HTTP channel on port 32469 (you'll see the client's role shortly):

```
// Create and register a server-side HttpChannel on port 32469.
HttpChannel c = new HttpChannel(32469);
ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);
```

Revisiting the Role of .NET Formatters

The final piece of the .NET remoting puzzle is the role of *formatter* objects. The `TcpChannel` and `HttpChannel` types both leverage an internal formatter, whose job it is to translate the message object into protocol-specific terms. As mentioned, the `TcpChannel` type makes use of the `BinaryFormatter` type, while the `HttpChannel` type uses the functionality provided by the `SoapFormatter` type. Given your work in the previous chapter, you should already have some insights as to how a given channel will format the incoming messages.

Once the formatted message has been generated, it is passed into the channel, where it will eventually reach its destination application domain, at which time the message is formatted from protocol-specific terms back to .NET-specific terms, at which point an entity termed the *dispatcher* invokes the correct method on the remote object.

All Together Now!

If your head is spinning from reading the previous sections, fear not! The transparent proxy, real proxy, message object, and dispatcher can typically be completely ignored, provided you are happy with the default remoting plumbing. To help solidify the sequence of events, ponder Figure 18-1, which illustrates the basic process of two objects communicating across distinct application domains.

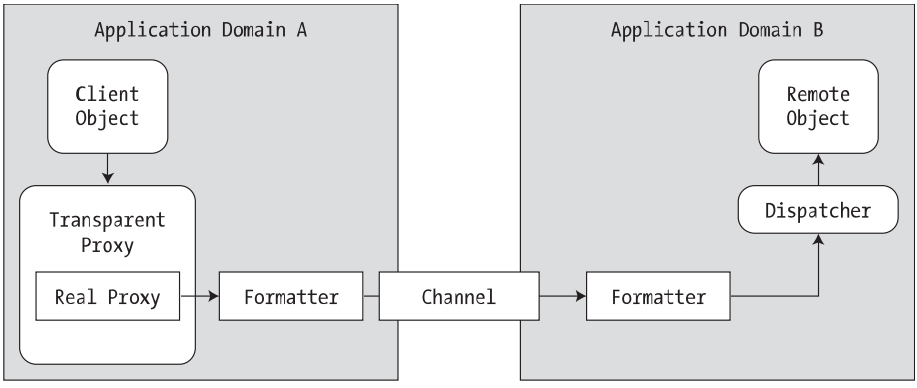


Figure 18-1. *A high-level view of the default .NET remoting architecture*

A Brief Word Regarding Extending the Default Plumbing

A key aspect of the .NET remoting layer is the fact that most of the default remoting layers can be extended or completely replaced at the whim of the developer. Thus, if you truly want (or possibly need) to build a custom message dispatcher, custom formatter, or custom real proxy, you are free to do so. You are also able to inject *additional* levels of indirection by plugging in custom types that stand between a given layer (e.g., a custom sink used to perform preprocessing or postprocessing of a given message). Now, to be sure, you may never need to retrofit the core .NET remoting layer in such ways. However, the fact remains that the .NET platform does provide the namespaces to allow you to do so.

■ **Note** This chapter does not address the topic of extending the default .NET remoting layer. If you wish to learn how to do so, check out *Advanced .NET Remoting* by Ingo Rammer (Apress, 2002).

Terms of the .NET Remoting Trade

Like any new paradigm, .NET remoting brings a number of TLAs (three-letter acronyms) into the mix. Thus, before you see your first code example, we do need to define a few terms used when describing the composition of a .NET remoting application. As you would guess, this terminology is used to describe a number of details regarding common questions that arise during the construction of a distributed application: How do we pass a type across application domain boundaries? When exactly is a remote type activated? How do we manage the lifetime of a remote object (and so forth)? Once you have an understanding of the related terminology, the act of building a distributed .NET application will be far less perplexing.

Object Marshaling Choices: MBR or MBV?

Under the .NET platform, you have two options regarding how a remote object is marshaled to the client. Simply put, *marshaling* describes how a remote object is passed between application domains. When you are designing a remotable object, you may choose to employ *marshal-by-reference* (*MBR*) or *marshal-by-value* (*MBV*) semantics. The distinction is as follows:

- *MBR objects*: The caller receives a proxy to the remote object.
- *MBV objects*: The caller receives a full copy of the object in its own application domain.

If you configure an MBR object type, the CLR ensures that the transparent and real proxies are created in the client's application domain, while the MBR object itself remains in the server's application domain. As the client invokes methods on the remote type, the .NET remoting plumbing (examined previously) takes over the show and will package, pass, and return information between application domain boundaries. To be sure, MBR objects have a number of traits above and beyond their physical location. As you will see, MBR objects have various configuration options regarding their activation options and lifetime management.

MBV objects, on the other hand, are *local copies* of remote objects (which leverage the .NET serialization protocol examined in Chapter 17). MBV objects have far fewer configuration settings, given that their lifetime is directly controlled by the client. Like any .NET object, once a client has released all references to an MBV type, it is a candidate for garbage collection. Given that MBV types are local copies of remote objects, as a client invokes members on the type, no network activity occurs during the process.

Now, understand that it will be quite common for a single server to provide access to numerous MBR and MBV types. As you may also suspect, MBR types tend to support methods that return various MBV types, which gives way to the familiar factory pattern (e.g., an object that creates and returns other related objects). The next question is, how do you configure your custom class types as MBR or MBV entities?

Configuring an MBV Object

The process of configuring an object as an MBV type is identical to the process of configuring an object for serialization. Simply annotate the type with the `[Serializable]` attribute:

```
[Serializable]
public class SportsCar
{...}
```

Configuring an MBR Object

MBR objects are not marked as such using a .NET attribute, but rather by deriving (directly or indirectly) from the `System.MarshalByRefObject` base class:

```
public class SportsCarFactory : MarshalByRefObject
{...}
```

Formally, the `MarshalByRefObject` type is defined as follows:

```
public abstract class MarshalByRefObject : object
{
     public virtual ObjRef CreateObjRef(Type requestedType);
     public virtual bool Equals(object obj);
     public virtual int GetHashCode();
     public virtual object GetLifetimeService();
     public Type GetType();
     public virtual object InitializeLifetimeService();
     public virtual string ToString();
}
```

Beyond the expected functionality provided by `System.Object`, Table 18-2 describes the role of the remaining members.

Table 18-2. *Key Members of* `System.MarshalByRefObject`

Member	Meaning in Life
`CreateObjRef()`	Creates an object that contains all the relevant information required to generate a proxy used to communicate with a remote object
`GetLifetimeServices()`	Retrieves the current lifetime service object that controls the lifetime policy for this instance
`InitializeLifetimeServices()`	Obtains a lifetime service object to control the lifetime policy for this instance

As you can tell, the gist of `MarshalByRefObject` is to define members that can be overridden to programmatically control the lifetime of the MBR object (more on lifetime management later in this chapter).

■ **Note** Just because you have configured a type as an MBV or MBR entity does not mean it is only usable within a remoting application, just that it *may* be used in a remoting application. For example, the `System.Windows.Forms.Form` type is a descendent of `MarshalByRefObject`; thus, if accessed remotely it is realized as an MBR type. If not, it is just another local object in the client's application domain.

■ **Note** As a corollary to the previous note, understand that if a .NET type is not serializable and does not include `MarshalByRefObject` in its inheritance chain, the type in question can only be activated and used in the originating application domain (meaning, the type is *context bound*; see Chapter 13 for more details).

Now that you understand the distinct traits of MBR and MBV types, let's check out some issues that are specific to MBR types (MBV types need not apply).

Activation Choices for MBR Types: WKO or CAO?

Another remoting-centric choice you face as a .NET programmer has to do with exactly *when* an MBR object is activated and *when* it should be a candidate for garbage collection on the server. This might seem like a strange choice to make, as you might naturally assume that MBR objects are created when the client requests them and die when the client is done with them. While it is true that the client is the entity in charge of instructing the remoting layer it wishes to communicate with a remote type, the server application domain may (or may not) create the type at the exact moment the client's code base requests it.

The reason for this seemingly strange behavior has to do with the optimization. Specifically, every MBR type may be configured to be activated using one of two techniques:

- As a well-known object (WKO)
- As a client-activated object (CAO)

■ **Note** A potential point of confusion is that fact that the acronym WKO is also called a *server-activated object* (*SAO*) in the .NET literature. In fact, you may see the SAO acronym in various .NET-centric articles and books. In keeping with the current terminology, I will use WKO throughout this chapter.

WKO objects are MBR types whose lifetimes are directly controlled by the server's application domain. The client-side application activates the remote type using a friendly, well-known string name (hence the term WKO). The server's application domain allocates WKO types when the client makes the first method call on the object (via the transparent proxy), *not* when the client's code base makes use of the `new` keyword or via the static `Activator.GetObject()` method, for example:

```
// Get a proxy to remote object. This line does NOT create the WKO type!
object remoteObj = Activator.GetObject( /* params seen later... */ );

// Invoke a method on remote WKO type. This WILL create the WKO object
// and invoke the ReturnMessage() method.
RemoteMessageObject simple = (RemoteMessageObject)remoteObj;
Console.WriteLine("Server says: {0}", simple.ReturnMessage());
```

The rationale for this behavior? This approach saves a network round-trip solely for the purpose of creating the object. As another interesting corollary, WKO types can *be created only via the type's default constructor*. This should make sense, given that the remote type's constructor is triggered only when the client makes the initial member invocation. Thus, the runtime has no other option than to invoke the type's default constructor.

■ **Note** Always remember: All WKO types must support a default constructor!

If you wish to allow the client to create a remote MBR object using a custom constructor, the server must configure the object as a CAO. CAO objects are entities whose lifetime is controlled by the client's application domain. When accessing a CAO type, a round-trip to the server occurs at the time the client makes use of the `new` keyword (using any of the type's constructors) or via the `Activator` type.

Stateful Configuration of WKO Types: Singleton or Single Call?

The final .NET design choice to consider with regard to MBR types has to do with how the server should handle multiple requests to a WKO type. CAO types need not apply, given that there is always a one-to-one correspondence between a client and a remote CAO type (because they are stateful).

Your first option is to configure a WKO type to function as a *singleton type*. The CLR will create a single instance of the remote type that will take requests from any number of clients, and it is a natural choice if you need to maintain stateful information among multiple remote callers. Given the fact that multiple clients could invoke the same method at the same time, the CLR places each client invocation on a new thread. It is *your* responsibility, however, to ensure that your objects are thread-safe using the same techniques described in Chapter 14.

In contrast, a *single call* object is a WKO type that exists only during the context of a single method invocation. Thus, if there are 20 clients making use of a WKO type configured with single call semantics, the server will create 20 distinct objects (one for each client), all of which are candidates for garbage collection directly after the method invocation. As you can guess, single call objects are far more scalable than singleton types, given that they are invariably stateless entities.

The server is the entity in charge of determining the stateful configuration of a given WKO type. Programmatically, these options are expressed via the `System.Runtime.Remoting.WellKnownObjectMode` enumeration:

```
public enum WellKnownObjectMode
{
    SingleCall,
    Singleton
```

Summarizing the Traits of MBR Object Types

As you have seen, configuring an MBV object is a no-brainer: Apply the `[Serializable]` attribute to allow copies of the type to be returned to the client's application domain. At this point, all interaction with the MBV type takes place in the client's locale. When the client is finished using the MBV type, it is a candidate for garbage collection, and all is well with the world.

With MBR types, however, you have a number of possible configuration choices. As you have seen, a given MBR type can be configured with regard to its time of activation, statefulness, and lifetime management. To summarize the array of possibilities, Table 18-3 documents how WKO and CAO types stack up against the traits you have just examined.

Table 18-3. *Configuration Options for MBR Types*

MBR Object Trait	WKO Behavior	CAO Behavior
Instantiation options	WKO types can only be activated using the default constructor of the type, which is triggered when the client makes the first method invocation.	CAO types can be activated using any constructor of the type. The remote object is created at the point the caller makes use of constructor semantics (or via the `Activator` type).
State management	WKO types can be configured as singleton or single call entities. Singleton types can service multiple clients and are therefore stateful. Single call types are alive only during a specific client-side invocation and are therefore stateless.	The lifetime of a CAO type is dictated by the caller; therefore, CAO types are stateful entities.
Lifetime management	Singleton WKO types make use of a lease-based management scheme (described later in this chapter). Single call WKO types are candidates for garbage collection after the current method invocation.	CAO types make use of a lease -based management scheme (described later in this chapter).

Basic Deployment of a .NET Remoting Project

Enough acronyms! At this point you are almost ready to build your first .NET remoting application. Before you do, however, I need to discuss one final detail: deployment. When you are building a .NET remoting application, you are almost certain to end up with three (yes, three, not two) distinct .NET assemblies that will constitute the entirety of your remote application. I am sure you can already account for the first two assemblies:

- *The client*: This assembly is the entity that is interested in obtaining access to a remote object (such as a Windows Forms or console application).
- *The server*: This assembly is the entity that receives channel requests from the remote client and hosts the remote objects.

So then, where does the third assembly fit in? In many cases, the server application is typically a host to a third assembly that defines and implements the remote objects. For convenience, I'll call

this assembly the *general assembly*. This decoupling of the assembly containing the remote objects and server host is quite important, in that both the client and the server assemblies typically set a reference to the general assembly to obtain the metadata definitions of the remotable types.

In the simplest case, the general assembly is placed into the application directory of the client and server. The only possible drawback to this approach is the fact that the client has a reference to an assembly that contains CIL code that is never used (which may be a problem if you wish to ensure that the end user cannot view proprietary code). Specifically, the only reason the client requires a reference to the general assembly is to obtain the metadata descriptions of the remotable types. You can overcome this glitch in several ways, for example:

- Construct your remote objects to make use of interface-based programming techniques. Given this, the client is able to set a reference to a .NET binary that contains nothing but interface definitions.
- Make use of the `soapsuds.exe` command-line application. Using this tool, you are able to generate an assembly that contains nothing but metadata descriptions of the remote types.
- Manually build an assembly that contains nothing but metadata descriptions of the remote types.

To keep things simple over the course of this chapter, you will build and deploy general assemblies that contain the required metadata as well as the CIL implementation.

■ **Note** If you wish to examine how to implement general assemblies using each of these alternatives, check out *Distributed .NET Programming in C#* by Tom Barnaby (Apress, 2002).

Building Your First Distributed Application

There is nothing more satisfying than building a distributed application using a new platform. To illustrate how quickly you're able to get up and running with the .NET remoting layer, let's build a simple example. As mentioned, the entirety of this example consists of three .NET assemblies:

- A general assembly named `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll`
- A client assembly named `SimpleRemoteObjectClient.exe`
- A server assembly named `SimpleRemoteObjectServer.exe`

Building the General Assembly

First, let's create the general assembly, `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll`, which will be referenced by both the server and client applications. `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll` defines a single MBR type named `RemoteMessageObject`, which supports two public members. The `DisplayMessage()` method prints a client-supplied message on the server's console window, while `ReturnMessage()` returns a message to the client. Here is the complete code of this new C# class library:

```
namespace SimpleRemotingAsm
{
     // This is a type that will be
     // marshaled by reference (MBR) if accessed remotely.
     public class RemoteMessageObject: MarshalByRefObject
     {
          public RemoteMessageObject()
          { Console.WriteLine("Constructing RemoteMessageObject!"); }
```

```
        // This method takes an input string
        // from the caller.
        public void DisplayMessage(string msg)
        { Console.WriteLine("Message is: {0}", msg);}

        // This method returns a value to the caller.
        public string ReturnMessage()
        { return "Hello from the server!"; }
    }
}
```

The major point of interest is the fact that the type derives from the `System.MarshalByRefObject` base class, which ensures that the derived class will be accessible via a client-side proxy. Also note the custom default constructor that will print out a message when an instance of the type comes to life. That's it. Go ahead and build your new `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll` assembly.

Building the Server Assembly

Recall that server assemblies are essentially hosts for general assemblies that contain the remotable objects. Create a console program named `SimpleRemoteObjectServer`. The role of this assembly is to open a channel for the incoming requests and register `RemoteMessageObject` as a WKO. To begin, reference the `System.Runtime.Remoting.dll` and `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll` assemblies, and update `Main()` as follows:

```
using System;
using System.Runtime.Remoting;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Http;
using SimpleRemotingAsm;

namespace SimpleRemoteObjectServer
{
    class SimpleObjServer
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Console.WriteLine("***** SimpleRemoteObjectServer started! *****");
            Console.WriteLine("Hit enter to end.");

            // Register a new HttpChannel
            HttpChannel c = new HttpChannel(32469);
            ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);

            // Register a WKO type, using singleton activation.
            RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType(
                typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
                "RemoteMsgObj.soap",
                WellKnownObjectMode.Singleton);
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

`Main()` begins by creating a new `HttpChannel` type using an arbitrary port ID. This port is opened on registering the channel via the static `ChannelServices.RegisterChannel()` method. Once the channel as been registered, the remote server assembly is now equipped to process incoming messages via port number 32469.

■ **Note** The number you assign to a port is typically up to you (or your system administrator). Do be aware, however, that port IDs below 1024 are reserved for system use.

Next, to register the `SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject` type as a WKO requires the use of the `RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType()` method. The first argument to this method is the type information of the type to be registered. The second parameter to `RegisterWellKnownServiceType()` is a simple string (of your choosing) that will be used to identify the object across application domain boundaries. Here, you are informing the CLR that this object is to be realized by the client using the name `RemoteMsgObj.soap`.

The final parameter is a member of the `WellKnownObjectMode` enumeration, which you have specified as `WellKnownObjectMode.Singleton`. Recall that singleton WKO types ensure that a single instance of the `RemoteMessageObject` will service all incoming requests. Build your server assembly and let's move on to the client-side code.

Building the SimpleRemoteObjectClient.exe Assembly

Now that you have a listener that is hosting your remotable object, the final step is to build an assembly that will request access to its services. Again, let's use a simple console application. Set a reference to `System.Runtime.Remoting.dll` and `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll`. Implement `Main()` as follows:

```
using System;
using System.Runtime.Remoting;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Http;
using SimpleRemotingAsm;

namespace SimpleRemoteObjectClient
{
     class SimpleObjClient
     {
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("***** SimpleRemoteObjectClient started! *****");
               Console.WriteLine("Hit enter to end.");

               // Create a new HttpChannel.
               HttpChannel c = new HttpChannel();
               ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);

                // Get a proxy to remote WKO type.
               object remoteObj = Activator.GetObject(
                    typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
                    "http://localhost:32469/RemoteMsgObj.soap");

               // Now use the remote object.
               RemoteMessageObject simple = (RemoteMessageObject)remoteObj;
               simple.DisplayMessage("Hello from the client!");
               Console.WriteLine("Server says: {0}", simple.ReturnMessage());
               Console.ReadLine();
          }
     }
}
```

A few notes about this client application. First, notice that the client is also required to register an HTTP channel, but the client does not specify a port ID, as the end point is specified by the client-supplied activation URL. Given that the client is interacting with a registered WKO type, you are limited to triggering the type's default constructor. To do so, make use of the `Activator.GetObject()` method, specifying two parameters. The first is the type information that describes the remote object you are interested in interacting with. Read that last sentence again. Given that the `Activator.GetObject()` method requires the object's metadata description, it should make more sense as to why the client is *also* required to reference the general assembly! Again, at the end of the chapter you'll examine various ways to clean up this aspect of your client-side assembly.

The second parameter to `Activator.GetObject()` is termed the *activation URL*. Activation URLs that describe a WKO type can be generalized into the following format:

```
ProtocolScheme://ComputerName:Port/ObjectUri
```

Finally, note that the `Activator.GetObject()` method returns a generic `System.Object` type, and thus you must make use of an explicit cast to gain access to the members of the `RemoteMessageObject`.

Testing the Remoting Application

To test your application, begin by launching the server application, which will open an HTTP channel and register `RemoteMessageObject` for remote for access. Next, launch an instance of the client application. If all is well, your server window should appear as shown in Figure 18-2, while the client application displays what you see in Figure 18-3.

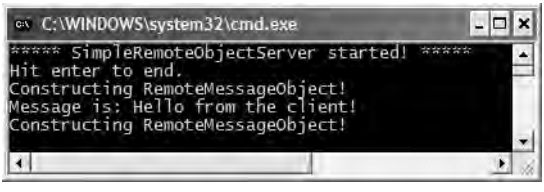


Figure 18-2. *The server's output*

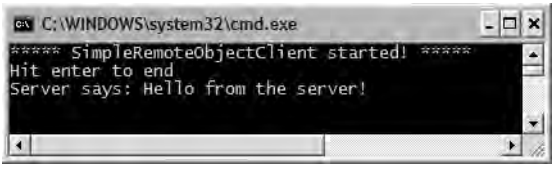


Figure 18-3. *The client's output*

Understanding the ChannelServices Type

As you have seen, when a server application wishes to advertise the existence of a remote type, it makes use of the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.ChannelServices` type. `ChannelServices` provides a small set of static methods that aid in the process of remoting channel registration, resolution, and URL discovery. Table 18-4 documents some of the core members.

Table 18-4. *Select Members of the* `ChannelServices` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`RegisteredChannels`	This property gets or sets a list of currently registered channels, each of which is represented by the `IChannel` interface.
`DispatchMessage()`	This method dispatches incoming remote calls.
`GetChannel()`	This method returns a registered channel with the specified name.
`GetUrlsForObject()`	This method returns an array of all the URLs that can be used to reach the specified object.
`RegisterChannel()`	This method registers a channel with the channel services.
`UnregisterChannel()`	This method unregisters a particular channel from the registered channels list.

In addition to the aptly named `RegisterChannel()` and `UnregisterChannel()` methods, `ChannelServices` defines the `RegisteredChannels` property. This member returns an array of `IChannel` interfaces, each representing a handle to each channel registered in a given application domain. The definition of the `IChannel` interface is quite straightforward:

```
public interface IChannel
{
    string ChannelName { get; }
    int ChannelPriority { get; }
    string Parse(string url, ref String objectURI);
}
```

As you can see, each channel is given a friendly string name as well as a priority level. To illustrate, if you were to update the `Main()` method of the `SimpleRemoteObjectClient` application with the following logic:

```
// List all registered channels.
IChannel[] channelObjs = ChannelServices.RegisteredChannels;
foreach(IChannel i in channelObjs)
{
     Console.WriteLine("Channel name: {0}", i.ChannelName);
     Console.WriteLine("Channel Priority: {0}", i.ChannelPriority);
}
```

you would find the client-side console now looks like Figure 18-4.

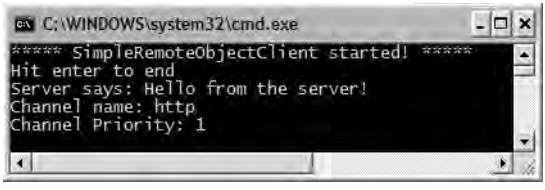


Figure 18-4. *Enumerating client-side channels*

Understanding the RemotingConfiguration Type

Another key remoting-centric type is `RemotingConfiguration`, which as its name suggests is used to configure various aspects of a remoting application. Currently, you have seen this type in use on the server side (via the call to the `RegisterWellKnownServiceType()` method). Table 18-5 lists additional static members of interest, some of which you'll see in action over the remainder of this chapter.

Table 18-5. *Members of the* `RemotingConfiguration` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`ApplicationId`	Gets the ID of the currently executing application
`ApplicationName`	Gets or sets the name of a remoting application
`ProcessId`	Gets the ID of the currently executing process
`Configure()`	Reads the configuration file and configures the remoting infrastructure
`GetRegisteredActivatedClientTypes()`	Retrieves an array of object types registered on the client as types that will be activated remotely
`GetRegisteredActivatedServiceTypes()`	Retrieves an array of object types registered on the service end that can be activated on request from a client
`GetRegisteredWellKnownClientTypes()`	Retrieves an array of object types registered on the client end as well-known types
`GetRegisteredWellKnownServiceTypes()`	Retrieves an array of object types registered on the service end as well-known types
`IsWellKnownClientType()`	Checks whether the specified object type is registered as a well-known client type
`RegisterActivatedClientType()`	Registers an object on the client end as a type that can be activated on the server
`RegisterWellKnownClientType()`	Registers an object on the client end as a well-known type (single call or singleton)
`RegisterWellKnownServiceType()`	Registers an object on the service end as a well-known type (single call or singleton)

Recall that the .NET remoting layer distinguishes between two types of MBR objects: WKO (server-activated) and CAO (client-activated). Furthermore, WKO types can be configured to make use of singleton or single call activations. Using the functionality of the `RemotingConfiguration` type, you are able to dynamically obtain such information at runtime. For example, if you update the `Main()` method of your `SimpleRemoteObjectServer` application with the following:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Set a friendly name for this server app.
     RemotingConfiguration.ApplicationName = "First server app!";
     Console.WriteLine("App Name: {0}",
          RemotingConfiguration.ApplicationName);

     // Get an array of WellKnownServiceTypeEntry types
     // that represent all the registered WKOs.
     WellKnownServiceTypeEntry[] WKOs =
          RemotingConfiguration.GetRegisteredWellKnownServiceTypes();
     // Now print their statistics.
```

```
     foreach(WellKnownServiceTypeEntry wko in WKOs)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Asm name containing WKO: {0}", wko.AssemblyName);
          Console.WriteLine("URL to WKO: {0}", wko.ObjectUri);
          Console.WriteLine("Type of WKO: {0}", wko.ObjectType);
          Console.WriteLine("Mode of WKO: {0}", wko.Mode);
     }
}
```

you would find a list of all WKO types registered by this server application domain. As you iterate over the array of `WellKnownServiceTypeEntry` types, you are able to print out various points of interest regarding each WKO. Given that your server's application registered only a single type (`SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject`), you'll receive the output shown in Figure 18-5.

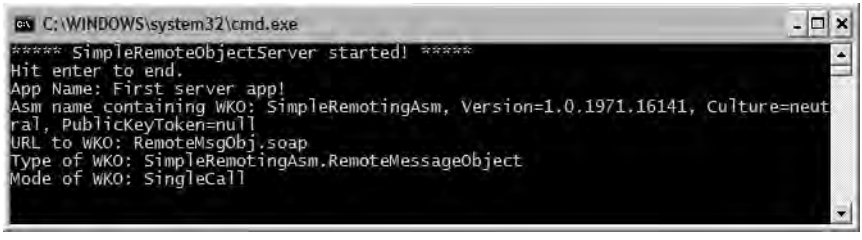


Figure 18-5. *Server-side statistics*

The other major method of the `RemotingConfiguration` type is `Configure()`. As you'll see in just a bit, this static member allows the client- and server-side application domains to make use of remoting configuration files.

Revisiting the Activation Mode of WKO Types

Recall that WKO types can be configured to function under singleton or single call activation. Currently, your server application has registered your WKO to employ singleton activation semantics:

```
// Singletons can service multiple clients.
RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType(
     typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
     "RemoteMsgObj.soap",
     WellKnownObjectMode.Singleton);
```

Again, singleton WKOs are capable of receiving requests from multiple clients. Thus, singleton objects maintain a one-to-many relationship between themselves and the remote clients. To test this behavior for yourself, run the server application (if it is not currently running) and launch three separate client applications. If you look at the output for the server, you will find a single call to the `RemoteMessageObject`'s default constructor.

Now to test the behavior of single call objects, modify the server to register the WKO to support single call activation:

```
// Single call types maintain a 1-to-1 relationship
// between client and WKO.
RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType(
     typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
     "RemoteMsgObj.soap",
     WellKnownObjectMode.SingleCall);
```

Once you have recompiled and run the server application, again launch three clients. This time you can see that a new `RemoteMessageObject` is created for each client request. As you might be able to gather, if you wish to share stateful data between multiple remote clients, singleton activation provides one possible alternative, as all clients are communicating with a single instance of the remote object.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleRemotingAsm, SimpleRemoteObjectServer, and SimpleRemoteObjectClient projects are located under the Chapter 18 directory.

Deploying the Server to a Remote Machine

At this point, you have just crossed an application and process boundary on a single machine. If you're connected to an additional machine, let's extend this example to allow the client to interact with the `RemoteMessageObject` type across a machine boundary. To do so, follow these steps:

1. On your server machine, create and share a folder to hold your server-side assemblies.
2. Copy the `SimpleRemoteObjectServer.exe` and `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll` assemblies to this server-side share point.
3. Open your `SimpleRemoteObjectClient` project workspace and retrofit the activation URL to specify the name of the remote machine, for example:

```
// Get a proxy to remote object.
object remoteObj = Activator.GetObject(
     typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
     "http://YourRemoteBoxName:32469/RemoteMsgObj.soap");
```

4. Execute the `SimpleRemoteObjectServer.exe` application on the server machine.
5. Execute the `SimpleRemoteObjectClient.exe` application on the client machine.
6. Sit back and grin.

■ **Note** Activation URLs may specify a machine's IP address in place of its friendly name.

Leveraging the TCP Channel

Currently, your remote object is accessible via the HTTP network protocol. As mentioned, this protocol is quite firewall-friendly, but the resulting SOAP packets are a bit on the bloated side (given the nature of XML data representation). To lighten the payload, you can update the client and server assemblies to make use of the TCP channel, and therefore make use of the `BinaryFormatter` type behind the scenes. Here are the relevant updates to the server assembly:

■ **Note** When you are defining an object to be URI-accessible via a TCP endpoint, it is common (but not required) to make use of the `*.rem` (i.e., remote) extension.

```
// Server adjustments!
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Tcp;
...
static void Main(string[] args)
```

```
{
...
     // Create a new TcpChannel
     TcpChannel c = new  TcpChannel(32469);
     ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);

     // Register a 'well-known' object in single call mode.
     RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType(
          typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
          "RemoteMsgObj.rem",
          WellKnownObjectMode.SingleCall);
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Notice that you are now registering a `System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Tcp.TcpChannel` type to the .NET remoting layer. Also note that the object URI has been altered to support a more generic name (`RemoteMsgObj.rem`) rather than the SOAP-centric `*.soap` extension. The client-side updates are equally as simple:

```
// Client adjustments!
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Tcp;
...
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
     // Create a new TcpChannel
     TcpChannel c = new TcpChannel();
     ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);
     // Get a proxy to remote object.
     object remoteObj = Activator.GetObject(
          typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
          "tcp://localhost:32469/RemoteMsgObj.rem");

     // Use object.
     RemoteMessageObject simple = (RemoteMessageObject)remoteObj;
     simple.DisplayMessage("Hello from the client!");
     Console.WriteLine("Server says: {0}", simple.ReturnMessage());
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

The only point to be aware of here is that the client's activation URL now must specify the `tcp://` channel qualifier rather than `http://`. Beyond that, the bulk of the code base is identical to the previous `HttpChannel` logic.

■ **Source Code** The TCPSimpleRemoteObjectServer and TCPSimpleRemoteObjectClient projects are located under the Chapter 18 directory (both projects use the `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll` created previously).

A Brief Word Regarding the IpcChannel

Before moving on to an examination of remoting configuration files, recall that .NET 2.0 also provides the `IpcChannel` type, which provides the fastest possible manner in which two applications *on the same machine* can exchange information. Given that this chapter is geared toward covering distributed programs that involve two or more computers, interested readers should look up `IpcChannel` in the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation (as you might guess, the code is just about identical to working with `HttpChannel` and `TcpChannel`).

Remoting Configuration Files

At this point you have successfully built a distributed application using the .NET remoting layer. One issue you may have noticed in these first examples is the fact that the client and the server applications have a good deal of hard-coded logic within their respective binaries. For example, the server specifies a fixed port ID, fixed activation mode, and fixed channel type. The client, on the other hand, hard-codes the name of the remote object it is attempting to interact with.

As you might agree, it is wishful thinking to assume that initial design notes remain unchanged once an application is deployed. Ideally, details such as port ID and object activation mode (and what-not) could be altered on the fly without needing to recompile and redistribute the client or server code bases. Under the .NET remoting scheme, all the aforementioned issues can be circumvented using the remoting configuration file.

As you will recall from Chapter 11, `*.config` can be used to provide hints to the CLR regarding the loading of externally referenced assemblies. The same `*.config` files can be used to inform the CLR of a number of remoting-related details, on both the client side and the server side.

When you build a remoting `*.config` file, the `<system.runtime.remoting>` element is used to hold various remoting-centric details. Do be aware that if you're building an application that already has a `*.config` file that specifies assembly resolution details, you're free to add remoting elements within the same file. Thus, a single `*.config` file that contains remoting and binding information would look something like this:

```
<configuration>
     <system.runtime.remoting>
          <! -- configure client/server remoting settings here -- >
     </system.runtime.remoting>
     <runtime>
          <! -- binding assembly settings here -- >
     </runtime>
</configuration>
```

If your configuration file has no need to specify assembly binding logic, you can omit the `<runtime>` element and make use of the following skeleton `*.config` file:

```
<configuration>
     <system.runtime.remoting>
          <! -- configure client/server remoting settings here -- >
     </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Building Server-Side *.config Files

Server-side configuration files allow you to declare the objects that are to be reached via remote invocations as well as channel and port information. Basically, using the `<service>`, `<wellknown>`, and `<channels>` elements, you are able to replace the following server-side logic:

```
// Hard-coded HTTP server logic.
HttpChannel c = new HttpChannel(32469);
ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);
RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType(
     typeof(SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject),
     "RemoteMsgObj.soap",
     WellKnownObjectMode.Singleton);
```

with the following `*.config` file:

```
<configuration>
  <system.runtime.remoting>
    <application>
      <service>
        <wellknown
          mode="Singleton"
          type="SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject, SimpleRemotingAsm"
          objectUri="RemoteMsgObj.soap"/>
      </service>
      <channels>
          <channel ref="http"/>
      </channels>
    </application>
  </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Notice that much of the relevant server-side remoting information is wrapped within the scope of the `<service>` (not *server*) element. The child `<wellknown>` element makes use of three attributes (`mode`, `type`, and `objectUri`) to specify the well-known object to register with the .NET remoting layer. The child `<channels>` element contains any number of `<channel>` elements that allow you to define the type of channel (in this case, HTTP) to open on the server. TCP channels would simply make use of the `tcp` string token in place of `http`.

As the `SimpleRemoteObjectServer.exe.config` file contains all the necessary information, the server-side `Main()` method cleans up considerably. All you are required to do is make a single call to `RemotingConfiguration.Configure()` and specify the name of your configuration file.

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     // Register a 'well-known' object using a *.config file.
     RemotingConfiguration.Configure("SimpleRemoteObjectServer.exe.config");
     Console.WriteLine("Server started!  Hit enter to end");
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Building Client-Side *.config Files

Clients are also able to leverage remoting-centric `*.config` files. Unlike a server-side configuration file, client-side configuration files make use of the `<client>` element to identify the name of the well-known object the caller wishes to interact with. In addition to providing the ability to dynamically change the remoting information without the need to recompile the code base, client-side `*.config` files allow you to create the proxy type directly using the C# `new` keyword, rather than the `Activator.GetObject()` method. Thus, if you have the following client-side `*.config` file:

```
<configuration>
   <system.runtime.remoting>
      <application>
         <client displayName = "SimpleRemoteObjectClient">
            <wellknown
               type="SimpleRemotingAsm.RemoteMessageObject, SimpleRemotingAsm"
               url="http://localhost:32469/RemoteMsgObj.soap"/>
         </client>
         <channels>
            <channel ref="http"/>
         </channels>
      </application>
   </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

you are able to update the client's `Main()` method as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     RemotingConfiguration.Configure("SimpleRemoteObjectClient.exe.config");
     // Using *.config file, the client is able to directly 'new' the type.
     RemoteMessageObject simple = new RemoteMessageObject();
     simple.DisplayMessage("Hello from the client!");
     Console.WriteLine("Server says: {0}", simple.ReturnMessage());
     Console.WriteLine("Client started!  Hit enter to end");
     Console.ReadLine();
}
```

Of course, when you run the application, the output is identical. If the client wishes to make use of the TCP channel, the `url` property of the `<wellknown>` element and `<channel>` `ref` property must make use of the `tcp` token in place of `http`.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleRemoteObjectServerWithConfig and SimpleRemoteObjectClientWithConfig projects are located under the Chapter 18 subdirectory (both of which make use of the `SimpleRemotingAsm.dll` created previously).

Working with MBV Objects

Our first remoting applications allowed client-side access to a single WKO type. Recall that WKO types are (by definition) MBR types, and therefore client access takes place via an intervening proxy. In contrast, MBV types are local copies of a server-side object, which are typically returned from a public member of an MBR type. Although you already know how to configure an MBV type (mark a class with the `[Serializable]` attribute), you have not yet seen an example of MBV types in action (beyond passing string data between the two parties). To illustrate the interplay of MBR and MBV types, let's see another example involving three assemblies:

- The general assembly named `CarGeneralAsm.dll`
- The client assembly named `CarProviderClient.exe`
- The server assembly named `CarProviderServer.exe`

As you might assume, the code behind the client and server applications is more or less identical to the previous example, especially since these applications will again make use of `*.config` files. Nevertheless, let's step through the process of building each assembly one at a time.

Building the General Assembly

During our examination of object serialization in Chapter 17, you created a type named `JamesBondCar` (in addition to the dependent `Radio` and `Car` classes). The `CarGeneralAsm.dll` code library will reuse these types, so begin by using the Project ➤ Add Existing Item menu command and include these `*.cs` files into this new Class Library project (the automatically provided `Class1.cs` file can be deleted). Given that each of these types has already been marked with the `[Serializable]` attribute, they are ready to be marshaled by value to a remote client.

All you need now is an MBR type that provides access to the `JamesBondCar` type. To make things a bit more interesting, however, your MBR object (`CarProvider`) will maintain a generic `List<>` of `JamesBondCar` types. `CarProvider` will also define two members that allow the caller to obtain a specific `JamesBondCar` as well as receive the entire `List<>` of types. Here is the complete code for the new class type:

```
namespace CarGeneralAsm
{
     // This type is an MBR object that provides
     // access to related MBV types.
     public class CarProvider : MarshalByRefObject
     {
        private List<JamesBondCar> theJBCars =
            new List<JamesBondCar>();

          // Add some cars to the list.
          public CarProvider()
          {
               Console.WriteLine("Car provider created");
               theJBCars.Add(new JamesBondCar("QMobile", 140, true, true));
               theJBCars.Add(new JamesBondCar("Flyer", 140, true, false));
               theJBCars.Add(new JamesBondCar("Swimmer", 140, false, true));
               theJBCars.Add(new JamesBondCar("BasicJBC", 140, false, false));
          }
          // Get all the JamesBondCars.
          public List<JamesBondCar>  GetAllAutos()
          { return theJBCars; }
          // Get one JamesBondCar.
          public JamesBondCar GetJBCByIndex(int i)
          { return (JamesBondCar)theJBCars[i]; }
     }
}
```

Notice that the `GetAllAutos()` method returns the internal `List<>` type. The obvious question is how this member of the `System.Collections.Generic` namespace is marshaled back to the caller. If you look up this type using the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation, you will find that `List<>` has been decorated with the `[Serializable]` attribute:

```
[SerializableAttribute()]
public class List<T> : IList, ICollection, IEnumerable
```

Therefore, the entire contents of the `List<>` type will be marshaled by value to the caller (provided the contained types are also serializable)! This brings up a very good point regarding .NET remoting and members of the base class libraries. In addition to the custom MBV and MBR types you may create yourself, understand that any type in the base class libraries that is decorated with the `[Serializable]` attribute is able to function as an MBV type in the .NET remoting architecture. Likewise, any type that derives (directly or indirectly) from `MarshalByRefObject` will function as an MBR type.

■ **Note** Be aware that the `SoapFormatter` does not support serialization of generic types. If you build methods that receive or return generic types (such as the `List<>`), you must make use of the `BinaryFormatter` and the `TcpChannel` object.

Building the Server Assembly

The server host assembly (`CarProviderServer.exe`) has the following logic within `Main()`:

```
using System;
using System.Runtime.Remoting;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Http;
using CarGeneralAsm;
```

```
namespace CarProviderServer
{
     class CarServer
     {
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               RemotingConfiguration.Configure("CarProviderServer.exe.config");
               Console.WriteLine("Car server started!  Hit enter to end");
               Console.ReadLine();
          }
     }
}
```

The related *.config file is just about identical to the server-side *.config file you created in the previous example. The only point of interest is to define an object URI value that makes sense for the CarProvider type:

```
<configuration>
     <system.runtime.remoting>
          <application>
               <service>
                    <wellknown mode="Singleton"
                         type="CarGeneralAsm.CarProvider, CarGeneralAsm"
                         objectUri="carprovider.rem" />
               </service>
               <channels>
                    <channel ref="tcp" port="32469" />
               </channels>
          </application>
     </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Building the Client Assembly

Last but not least, we have the client application that will make use of the MBR CarProvider type in order to obtain discrete JamesBondCars types as well as the List<> type. Once you obtain a type from the CarProvider, you'll send it into the UseCar() helper function from processing:

```
using System;
using System.Runtime.Remoting;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Http;
using CarGeneralAsm;
using System.Collections.Generic;

namespace CarProviderClient
{
     class CarClient
     {
          private static void UseCar(JamesBondCar c)
          {
               Console.WriteLine("-> Name: {0}", c.PetName);
               Console.WriteLine("-> Max speed: {0}", c.MaxSpeed);
               Console.WriteLine("-> Seaworthy? : {0}", c.isSeaWorthy);
               Console.WriteLine("-> Flight worthy? : {0}", c.isFlightWorthy);
               Console.WriteLine();
          }
```

```
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            RemotingConfiguration.Configure("CarProviderClient.exe.config");
            // Make the car provider.
            CarProvider cp = new CarProvider();
            // Get first JBC.
            JamesBondCar qCar = cp.GetJBCByIndex(0);
            // Get all JBCs.
            List<JamesBondCar> allJBCs = cp.GetAllAutos();
            // Use first car.
            UseCar(qCar);
            // Use all cars in List<>.
            foreach(JamesBondCar j in allJBCs)
                UseCar(j);
            Console.WriteLine("Client started!  Hit enter to end");
            Console.ReadLine();
        }
    }
}
```

The client side *.config file is also what you would expect. Simply update the activation URL:

```
<configuration>
   <system.runtime.remoting>
      <application>
         <client displayName = "CarClient">
            <wellknown
               type="CarGeneralAsm.CarProvider, CarGeneralAsm"
               url="tcp://localhost:32469/carprovider.rem"/>
         </client>
         <channels>
            <channel ref="http"/>
         </channels>
      </application>
   </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Now, run your server and client applications (in that order, of course) and observe the output. Your client-side console window will whirl through the JamesBondCars and print out the statistics of each type. Recall that as you interact with the List<> and JamesBondCar types, you are operating on their members within the client's application domain, as they have both been marked with the [Serializable] attribute.

To prove that point, update the UseCar() helper function to call the TurnOnRadio() method on the incoming JamesBondCar. Now, run the server and client applications once again. Notice that the message box appears on the client machine! Had the Car, Radio, and JamesBondCar types been configured as MBR types, the server would be the machine displaying the message box prompts. If you wish to verify this, derive each type from MarshalByRefObject and recompile all three assemblies (to ensure Visual Studio 2005 copies the latest CarGeneralAsm.dll into the client's and server's application directory). When you run the application once again, the message boxes appear on the remote machine.

■ **Source Code** The CarGeneralAsm, CarProviderServer, and CarProviderClient projects are located under the Chapter 18 subdirectory.

Understanding Client-Activated Objects

All of these current remoting examples have made use of WKOs. Recall that WKOs have the following characteristics:

- WKOs can be configured either as singleton or single call.
- WKOs can only be activated using the type's default constructor.
- WKOs are instantiated on the server on the first client-side member invocation.

CAO types on the other hand, can be instantiated using any constructor on the type and are created at the point the client makes use of the C# `new` keyword or `Activator` type. Furthermore, the lifetime of CAO types is monitored by the .NET leasing mechanism. Do be aware that when you configure a CAO type, the .NET remoting layer will generate a specific CAO remote object to service each client. Again, the big distinction is the fact that CAOs are always alive (and therefore stateful) beyond a single method invocation.

To illustrate the construction, hosting, and consumption of CAO types, let's retrofit the previous automobile-centric general assembly. Assume that your MBR `CarProvider` class has defined an additional constructor that allows the client to pass in an array of `JamesBondCar` types that will be used to populate the generic `List<>`:

```
public class CarProvider : MarshalByRefObject
{
     private List<JamesBondCar> theJBCars
        = new List<JamesBondCar>();

     public CarProvider(JamesBondCar[] theCars)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Car provider created with custom ctor");
          theJBCars.AddRange(theCars);
     }
...
}
```

To allow the caller to activate the `CarProvider` using your new constructor syntax, you need to build a server application that registers `CarProvider` as a CAO type rather than a WKO type. This may be done programmatically (à la the `RemotingConfiguration.RegisterActivatedServiceType()` method) or using a server-side `*.config` file. If you wish to hard-code the name of the CAO object within the host server's code base, all you need to do is pass in the type information of the type(s) (after creating and registering a channel) as follows:

```
// Hard-code the fact that CarProvider is a CAO type.
RemotingConfiguration.RegisterActivatedServiceType(
     typeof(CAOCarGeneralAsm.CarProvider));
```

If you would rather leverage the `*.config` file, replace the `<wellknown>` element with the `<activated>` element as follows:

```
<configuration>
     <system.runtime.remoting>
          <application>
               <service>
                    <activated type = "CAOCarGeneralAsm.CarProvider,
                         CAOCarGeneralAsm"/>
               </service>
               <channels>
                    <channel ref="tcp" port="32469" />
               </channels>
```

```
        </application>
    </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Finally, you need to update the client application, not only by way of the *.config file (or programmatically in the code base) to request access to the remote CAO, but also to indeed trigger the custom constructor of the CarProvider type. Here are the relevant updates to the client-side Main() method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Read updated *.config file.
    RemotingConfiguration.Configure("CAOCarProviderClient.exe.config");
    // Create array of types to pass to provider.
    JamesBondCar[] cars =
    {
        new JamesBondCar("Viper", 100, true, false),
        new JamesBondCar("Shaken", 100, false, true),
        new JamesBondCar("Stirred", 100, true, true)
    };
    // Now trigger the custom ctor.
    CarProvider cp = new CarProvider(cars);
...
}
```

The updated client-side *.config file also makes use of the <activated> element, as opposed to <wellknown>. In addition, the <client> element now requires the url property to define the location of the registered CAO. Recall that when the server registered the CarProvider as a WKO, the client specified such information within the <wellknown> element.

```
<configuration>
   <system.runtime.remoting>
      <application>
         <client displayName = "CarClient"
                 url = "tcp://localhost:32469">
            <activated type = "CAOCarGeneralAsm.CarProvider, CAOCarGeneralAsm" />
         </client>
         <channels>
            <channel ref="tcp"/>
         </channels>
      </application>
   </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

If you would rather hard-code the client's request to the CAO type, you can make use of the RegistrationServices.RegisterActivatedClientType() method as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Use hard-coded values.
    RemotingConfiguration.RegisterActivatedClientType(
        typeof(CAOCarGeneralAsm.CarProvider),
        "tcp://localhost:32469");
...
}
```

If you now execute the updated server and client assemblies, you will be pleased to find that you are able to pass your custom array of JamesBondCar types to the remote CarProvider via the overloaded constructor.

■ **Source Code** The CAOCarGeneralAsm, CAOCarProviderServer, and CAOCarProviderClient projects are located under the Chapter 18 subdirectory.

The Lease-Based Lifetime of CAO/WKO-Singleton Objects

As you have seen, WKO types configured with single call activation are alive only for the duration of the current method call. Given this fact, WKO single call types are stateless entities. As soon as the current invocation has completed, the WKO single call type is a candidate for garbage collection.

On the other hand, CAO types and WKO types that have been configured to use singleton activation are both, by their nature, stateful entities. Given these two object configuration settings, the question that must be asked is, how does the server process know when to destroy these MBR objects? Clearly, it would be a huge problem if the server machine garbage-collected MBR objects that were currently in use by a remote client. If the server machine waits too long to release its set of MBR types, this may place undo stress on the system, especially if the MBR object(s) in question maintain valuable system resources (database connections, unmanaged types, and whatnot).

The lifetime of a CAO or WKO-singleton MBR type is governed by a "lease time" that is tightly integrated with the .NET garbage collector. If the lease time of a CAO or WKO-singleton MBR type expires, the object is ready to be garbage-collected on the next collection cycle. Like any .NET type, if the remote object has overridden `System.Object.Finalize()` (via the C# destructor syntax), the .NET runtime will indeed trigger the finalization logic.

The Default Leasing Behavior

CAO and WKO-singleton MBR types have what is known as a *default lease*, which lasts for five minutes. If the runtime detects five minutes of inactivity have passed for a CAO or WKO-singleton MBR type, the assumption is that the client is no longer making use of the object and therefore the remote object may be garbage-collected. However, when the default lease expires, this does not imply that the object is *immediately* marked for garbage collection. In reality, there are many ways to influence the behavior of the default lease.

First and foremost, anytime the remote client invokes a member of the remote CAO or WKO-singleton MBR type, the lease is renewed back to its five-minute limit. In addition to the automatic client-invocation-centric renew policy, the .NET runtime provides three additional alternatives:

- `*.config` files can be authored that override the default lease settings for remote objects.
- Server-side lease sponsors can be used to act on behalf of a remote object whose lease time has expired.
- Client-side lease sponsors can be used to act on behalf of a remote object whose lease time has expired.

We will check out these options over the next several sections, but for the time being let's examine the default lease settings of a remote type. Recall that the `MarshalByRefObject` base class defines a member named `GetLifetimeService()`. This method returns a reference to an internally implemented object that supports the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime.ILease` interface. As you would guess, the `ILease` interface can be used to interact with the leasing behavior of a given CAO or WKO-singleton type. Here is the formal definition:

```
public interface ILease
{
    TimeSpan CurrentLeaseTime { get; }
```

```
    LeaseState CurrentState { get; }
    TimeSpan InitialLeaseTime { get; set; }
    TimeSpan RenewOnCallTime { get; set; }
    TimeSpan SponsorshipTimeout { get; set; }
    void Register(System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime.ISponsor obj);
    void Register(System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime.ISponsor obj,
        TimeSpan renewalTime);
    TimeSpan Renew(TimeSpan renewalTime);
    void Unregister(System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime.ISponsor obj);
}
```

The `ILease` interface not only allows you to obtain information regarding the current lease (via `CurrentLeaseTime`, `CurrentState`, and `InitialLeaseTime`), but also provides the ability to build lease "sponsors" (more details on this later). Table 18-6 documents role of each `ILease` member.

Table 18-6. *Members of the* `ILease` *Interface*

Member	Meaning in Life
`CurrentLeaseTime`	Gets the amount of time remaining before the object deactivates, if it does not receive further method invocations.
`CurrentState`	Gets the current state of the lease, represented by the `LeaseState` enumeration.
`InitialLeaseTime`	Gets or sets the initial amount of time for a given lease. The initial lease time of an object is the amount of time following the initial activation before the lease expires if no other method calls occur.
`RenewOnCallTime`	Gets or sets the amount of time by which a call to the remote object increases the `CurrentLeaseTime`.
`SponsorshipTimeout`	Gets or sets the amount of time to wait for a sponsor to return with a lease renewal time.
`Register()`	Overloaded. Registers a sponsor for the lease.
`Renew()`	Renews a lease for the specified time.
`Unregister()`	Removes a sponsor from the sponsor list.

To illustrate the characteristics of the default lease of a CAO or WKO-singleton remote object, assume that your current `CAOCarGeneralAsm` project has defined a new internal class named `LeaseInfo`. `LeaseInfo` supports a static member named `LeaseStats()`, which dumps select statistics regarding the current lease for the `CarProvider` type to the server-side console window (be sure to specify a `using` directive for the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime` namespace to inform the compiler where the `ILease` type is defined):

```
internal class LeaseInfo
{
     public static void LeaseStats(ILease itfLease)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("***** Lease Stats *****");
          Console.WriteLine("Lease state: {0}", itfLease.CurrentState);
          Console.WriteLine("Initial lease time: {0}:{1}",
               itfLease.InitialLeaseTime.Minutes,
               itfLease.InitialLeaseTime.Seconds);
          Console.WriteLine("Current lease time: {0}:{1}",
               itfLease.CurrentLeaseTime.Minutes,
               itfLease.CurrentLeaseTime.Seconds);
          Console.WriteLine("Renew on call time: {0}:{1}",
               itfLease.RenewOnCallTime.Minutes,
```

```
            itfLease.RenewOnCallTime.Seconds);
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
}
```

Now that you have this helper type in place, assume `LeaseInfo.LeaseStats()` is called within the `GetJBCByIndex()` and `GetAllAutos()` methods of the `CarProvider` type. Once you recompile the server and client assemblies (again, simply to ensure Visual Studio 2005 copies the latest and greatest version of the `CarGeneralAsm.dll` to the client and server application directories), run the application once again. Your server's console window should now look something like Figure 18-6.

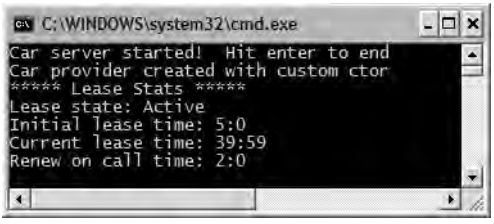

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
Car server started! Hit enter to end
Car provider created with custom ctor
***** Lease Stats *****
Lease state: Active
Initial lease time: 5:0
Current lease time: 39:59
Renew on call time: 2:0

Figure 18-6. *The default lease information for* `CarProvider`

Altering the Default Lease Characteristics

Obviously, the default lease characteristics of a CAO/WKO-singleton type may not be appropriate for each and every CAO or WKO-singleton remote object. If you wish to alter these default settings, you have two approaches:

- You can adjust the default lease settings using a server-side `*.config` file.
- You can programmatically alter the settings of a type's default lease by overriding members of the `MarshalByRefObject` base class.

While each of these options will indeed alter the default lease settings, there is a key difference. When you make use of a server-side `*.config` file, the lease settings affect *all* objects hosted by the server process. In contrast, when you override select members of the `MarshalByRefObject` type, you are able to change lease settings on an object-by-object basis.

To illustrate changing the default lease settings via a remoting `*.config` file, assume you have updated the server-side XML data with the following additional `<lifetime>` element:

```
<configuration>
    <system.runtime.remoting>
        <application>
            <lifetime leaseTime = "15M" renewOnCallTime = "5M"/>
            <service>
                <activated type = "CarGeneralAsm.CarProvider, CarGeneralAsm"/>
            </service>
            <channels>
                <channel ref="tcp" port="32469" />
            </channels>
        </application>
    </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Notice how the `leaseTime` and `renewOnCallTime` properties have been marked with the `M` suffix, which as you might guess stands for the number of minutes to set for each lease-centric unit of time. If you wish, your `<lifetime>` element may also suffix the numerical values with `MS` (milliseconds), `S` (seconds), `H` (hours), or even `D` (days).

Now recall that when you update the server's `*.config` file, you have effectively changed the leasing characteristics for each CAO/WKO-singleton object hosted by the server. As an alternative, you may choose to programmatically override the `InitializeLifetime()` method in a specific remote type:

```
public class CarProvider : MarshalByRefObject
{
     public override object InitializeLifetimeService()
     {
          // Obtain the current lease info.
          ILease itfLeaseInfo =
               (ILease) base.InitializeLifetimeService();
          // Adjust settings.
          itfLeaseInfo.InitialLeaseTime = TimeSpan.FromMinutes(50);
          itfLeaseInfo.RenewOnCallTime = TimeSpan.FromMinutes(10);
          return itfLeaseInfo;
     }
...
}
```

Here, the `CarProvider` has altered its `InitialLeaseTime` value to 50 minutes and its `RenewOnCallTime` value to 10. Again, the benefit of overriding `InitializeLifetimeServices()` is the fact that you can configure each remote type individually.

Finally, on an odd note, if you wish to disable lease-based lifetime for a given CAO/WKO-singleton object type, you may override `InitializeLifetimeServices()` and simply return null. If you do so, you have basically configured an MBR type that will *never* die as long as the hosting server application is alive and kicking.

Server-Side Lease Adjustment

As you have just seen, when an MBR type overrides `InitializeLifetimeServices()`, it is able to change its default leasing behavior at the time of activation. However, for the sake of argument, what if a remote type desires to change its current lease *after* its activation cycle? For example, assume the `CarProvider` has a new method whose implementation requires a lengthy operation (such as connecting to a remote database and reading a large set of records). Before beginning the task, you may programmatically adjust your lease such that if you have less than one minute, you renew the lease time to ten minutes. To do so, you can make use of the inherited `MarshalByRefObject.GetLifetimeService()` and `ILease.Renew()` methods as follows:

```
// Server-side lease adjustment.
// Assume this new method is of the CarProvider type.
public void DoLengthyOperation()
{
     ILease itfLeaseInfo = (ILease)this.GetLifetimeService();
     if(itfLeaseInfo.CurrentLeaseTime.TotalMinutes < 1.0)
          itfLeaseInfo.Renew(TimeSpan.FromMinutes(10));

     // Do lengthy task...
}
```

Client-Side Lease Adjustment

On an additional ILease-related note, it is possible for the client's application domain to adjust the current lease properties for a CAO/WKO-singleton type it is communicating with across the wire. To do so, the client makes use of the static RemotingServices.GetLifetimeService() method. As a parameter to this member, the client passes in the reference to the remote type as follows:

```
// Client-side lease adjustment.
CarProvider cp = new CarProvider(cars);
ILease itfLeaseInfo = (ILease)RemotingServices.GetLifetimeService(cp);
if(itfLeaseInfo.CurrentLeaseTime.TotalMinutes < 10.0)
     itfLeaseInfo.Renew(TimeSpan.FromMinutes(1000));
```

This approach can be helpful if the client's application domain is about to enter a lengthy process on the same thread of execution that is using the remote type. For example, if a single-threaded application is about to print out a 100-page document, the chances are quite good that a remote CAO/WKO-singleton type may time out during the process. The other (more elegant) solution, of course, is to spawn a secondary thread of execution, but I think you get the general idea.

Server-Side (and Client-Side) Lease Sponsorship

The final topic regarding the lease-based lifetime of a CAO/WKO-singleton object to consider is the notion of *lease sponsorship*. As you have just seen, every CAO/WKO-singleton entity has a default lease, which may be altered in a number of ways on both the server side as well as the client side. Now, regardless of the type's lease configuration, eventually an MBR object's time will be up. At this point, the runtime will garbage-collect the entity . . . well, almost.

The truth of the matter is that before an expired type is truly marked for garbage collection, the runtime will check to see if the MBR object in question has any registered lease sponsors. Simply put, a sponsor is a type that implements the ISponsor interface, which is defined as follows:

```
public interface System.Runtime.Remoting.Lifetime.ISponsor
{
     TimeSpan Renewal(ILease lease);
}
```

If the runtime detects that an MBR object has a sponsor, it will *not* garbage-collect the type, but rather call the Renewal() method of the sponsor object to (once again) add time to the current lease. On the other hand, if the MBR has no sponsor, the object's time is truly up.

Assuming that you have created a custom class that implements ISponsor, and thus implements Renewal() to return a specific unit of time (via the TimeSpan type), the next question is how exactly to associate the type to a given remote object. Again, this operation may be performed by either the server's application domain or the client's application domain.

To do so, the interested party obtains an ILease reference (via the inherited GetLifetimeService() method on the server or using the static RemotingServices.GetLifetimeService() method on the client) and calls Register():

```
// Server-side sponsor registration.
CarSponsor mySponsor = new CarSponsor();
ILease itfLeaseInfo = (ILease)this.GetLifetimeService();
itfLeaseInfo.Register(mySponsor);

// Client-side sponsor registration.
CarSponsor mySponsor = new CarSponsor();
CarProvider cp = new CarProvider(cars);
ILease itfLeaseInfo = (ILease)RemotingServices.GetLifetimeService(cp);
itfLeaseInfo.Register(mySponsor);
```

In either case, if a client or server wishes to revoke sponsorship, it may do so using the `ILease.Unregister()` method, for example:

```
// Remove the sponsor for a given object.
itfLeaseInfo.Unregister(mySponsor);
```

■ **Note** Client-side sponsored objects, in addition to implementing `ISponsor`, must also derive from `MarshalByRefObject`, given that the client must pass the sponsor to the remote application domain!

So, as you can see, the lifetime management of stateful MBR types is a bit more complex than a standard garbage collection. On the plus side, you have a *ton* of control regarding when a remote type is destined to meet its maker. However, as you may have gathered, there is the chance that a remote type may be removed from memory without the client's knowledge. Should a client attempt to invoke members on a type that has already been removed from memory, the runtime will throw a `System.Runtime.Remoting.RemotingException`, at which point the client may create a brand-new instance of the remote type or simply take an alternative course of action.

■ **Source Code** The CAOCarGeneralAsmLease, CAOCarProviderServerLease, and CAOCarProviderClientLease projects are located under the Chapter 18 subdirectory.

Alternative Hosts for Remote Objects

Over the course of this chapter, you have constructed numerous console-based server hosts, which provide access to some set of remote objects. If you have a background in the classic Distributed Component Object Model (DCOM), this step may have seemed a bit odd. In the world of DCOM, it was not unusual to build a single server-side COM server that contained the remote objects and was also in charge of receiving incoming requests from some remote client. This single `*.exe` DCOM application would quietly load in the background without presenting a looming command window.

When you are building a .NET server assembly, the chances are quite good that the remote machine does not need to display any sort of UI. Rather, all you really wish to do is build a server-side entity that opens the correct channel(s) and registers the remote object(s) for client-side access. Moreover, when you build a simple console host, you (or someone) is required to manually run the server-side `*.exe` assembly, due to the fact that .NET remoting will not automatically run a server-side `*.exe` when called by a remote client.

Given these two issues, the question then becomes, how can you build an invisible listener that loads automatically? .NET programmers have two major choices at their disposal when they wish to build a transparent host for various remote objects:

- Build a .NET Windows service application to host the remote objects.
- Allow IIS to host the remote objects.

Hosting Remote Objects Using a Windows Service

Perhaps the ideal host for remote objects is a Windows service, given that it

- Can be configured to load automatically on system startup
- Runs as an invisible background process
- Can be run under specific user accounts

As luck would have it, building a custom Windows service using the .NET platform is extremely simple when contrasted to the raw Win32 API. To illustrate, let's create a Windows Service project named `CarWinService` (see Figure 18-7) that will be in charge of hosting the remote types contained within the `CarGeneralAsm.dll`.

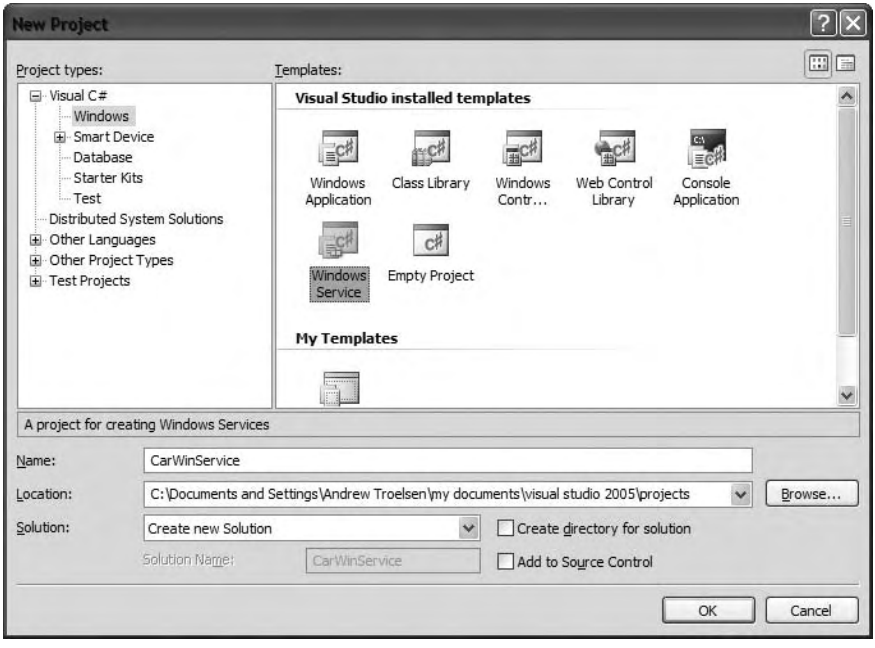


Figure 18-7. *Creating a new Windows Service project workspace*

Visual Studio 2005 responds by generating a partial class (named `Service1` by default), which derives from `System.ServiceProcess.ServiceBase`, and another class (`Program`), which implements the service's `Main()` method. Given that `Service1` is a rather nondescript name for your custom service, the first order of business is to change the values of the `(Name)` and `ServiceName` properties to `CarService` using the IDE's Properties window. The distinction between these two settings is that the `(Name)` value is used to define the name used to refer to your type in the code base, while the `ServiceName` property marks the name to display to Windows service–centric configuration tools.

Before moving on, be sure you set a reference to the `CarGeneralAsm.dll` and `System.Remoting.dll` assemblies, and specify the following additional `using` directives to the file containing the `CarService` class definition:

```
using System.Runtime.Remoting;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels.Http;
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Channels;
using System.Diagnostics;
```

Implementing the Main() Method

The `Main()` method of the `Program` class is in charge of running each service defined in the project by passing an array of `ServiceBase` types into the static `Service.Run()` method. Given that you have renamed your custom service from `Service1` to `CarService`, you should find the following class definition (comments deleted for clarity):

```
static class Program
{
    static void Main()
    {
        ServiceBase[] ServicesToRun;
        ServicesToRun = new ServiceBase[] { new CarService() };
        ServiceBase.Run(ServicesToRun);
    }
}
```

Implementing CarService.OnStart()

You can likely already assume what sort of logic should happen when your custom service is started on a given machine. Recall that the role of `CarService` is to perform the same tasks as your custom console-based service. Thus, if you wish to register `CarService` as a WKO-singleton type that is available via HTTP, you could add the following code to the `OnStart()` method (as you would hope, you may make use of the `RemotingConfiguration` type to load up a server-side remoting `*.config` file, rather than hard-coding your implementation, when hosting remote objects using a Windows service):

```
protected override void OnStart(string[] args)
{
     // Create a new HttpChannel.
     HttpChannel c = new HttpChannel(32469);
     ChannelServices.RegisterChannel(c);
     // Register as single call WKO.
     RemotingConfiguration.RegisterWellKnownServiceType(
          typeof(CarGeneralAsm.CarProvider),
          "CarProvider.soap",
          WellKnownObjectMode.SingleCall);

     // Log successful startup.
     EventLog.WriteEntry("CarWinService",
          "CarWinService started successfully!",
          EventLogEntryType.Information);
}
```

Note that once the type has been registered, you log a custom message to the Windows event log (via the `System.Diagnostics.EventLog` type) to document that the host machine successfully started your service.

Implementing OnStop()

Technically speaking, the `CarService` does not demand any sort of shutdown logic. For illustrative purposes, let's post another event to the `EventLog` to log the termination of the custom Windows service:

```
protected override void OnStop()
{
     EventLog.WriteEntry("CarWinService",
          "CarWinService stopped",
          EventLogEntryType.Information);
}
```

Now that the service is complete, the next task is to install this service on the remote machine.

Adding a Service Installer

Before you can install your service on a given machine, you need to add an additional type into your current `CarWinService` project. Specifically, any Windows service (written using .NET or the Win32 API) requires a number of registry entries to be made to allow the OS to interact with the service itself. Rather than making these entries manually, you can simply add an `Installer` type to a Windows service project, which will configure your `ServiceBase`-derived type correctly when installed on the target machine.

To add an installer for the `CarService`, open the design-time service editor (by double-clicking the `CarService.cs` file from Solution Explorer), right-click anywhere within the designer, and select Add Installer (see Figure 18-8).

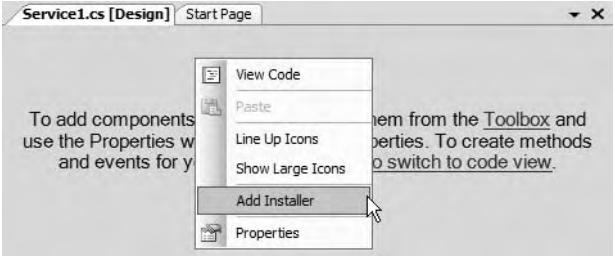


Figure 18-8. *Including an installer for the custom Windows service*

This selection will add a new component that derives from the `System.Configuration.Install.Installer` base class. On your designer will be two components. The `serviceInstaller1` type represents a specific service installer for a specific service in your project. If you select this icon and view the Properties window, you will find that the `ServiceName` property has been set to the `CarService` class type.

The second component (`serviceProcessInstaller1`) allows you to establish the identity under which the installed service will execute. By default, the `Account` property is set to `User`. Using the Properties window of Visual Studio 2005, change this value to **LocalService** (see Figure 18-9).



Figure 18-9. *Establishing the identity of the* `CarService`

That's it! Now compile your project.

Installing the CarWinService

Installing `CarService.exe` on a given machine (local or remote) requires two steps:

1. Move the compiled service assembly (and any necessary external assemblies; `CarGeneralAsm.dll` in this example) to the remote machine.
2. Run the `installutil.exe` command-line tool, specifying your service as an argument.

Assuming step 1 is complete, open a Visual Studio 2005 command window, navigate to the location of the `CarWinService.exe` assembly, and issue the following command (note that this same tool can be used to uninstall a service as well):

```
installutil carwinservice.exe
```

Once this Windows service has been properly installed, you are now able to start and configure it using the Services applet, which is located under the Administrative Tools folder of your system's Control Panel. Once you have located your `CarService` (see Figure 18-10), click the Start link to load and run the binary.

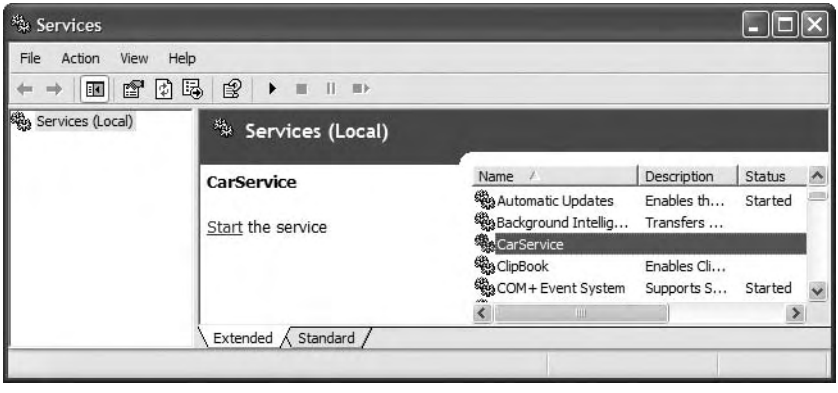


Figure 18-10. *The Windows Services applet*

■ **Source Code** The CarWinService project is located under the Chapter 18 subdirectory.

Hosting Remote Objects Using IIS

Hosting a remote assembly under IIS is even simpler than building a Windows service, as IIS is preprogrammed to allow incoming HTTP requests via port 80. Now, given the fact that IIS is a *web* server, it should stand to reason that IIS is only able to host remote objects using the `HttpChannel` type (unlike a Windows service, which can also leverage the `TcpChannel` type). Assuming this is not perceived as a limitation, follow these steps to leverage the remoting support of IIS:

1. On your hard drive, create a new folder to hold your `CarGeneralAsm.dll`. Within this folder, create a subdirectory named `\Bin`. Now, copy the `CarGeneralAsm.dll` to this subdirectory (e.g., C:\IISCarService\Bin).
2. Open the Internet Information Services applet on the host machine (located under the Administrative Tools folder in your system's Control Panel).
3. Right-click the Default Web Site node and select New ➤ Virtual Directory.
4. Create a virtual directory that maps to the root folder you just created (C:\IISCarService). The remaining default settings presented by the New Virtual Directory Wizard are fine.
5. Finally, create a new configuration file named `web.config` to control how this virtual directory should register the remote type (see the following code). Make sure this file is saved under the root folder (in this example, C:\IISCarService).

```
<configuration>
     <system.runtime.remoting>
          <application>
               <service>
                    <wellknown mode="Singleton"
                         type="CarGeneralAsm.CarProvider, CarGeneralAsm"
                         objectUri="carprovider.soap" />
               </service>
               <channels>
                    <channel ref="http"/>
               </channels>
          </application>
     </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

Now that your `CarGeneralAsm.dll` has been configured to be reachable via HTTP requests under IIS, you can update your client-side `*.config` file as follows (using the name of your IIS host, of course):

```
<configuration>
   <system.runtime.remoting>
      <application>
         <client displayName = "CarClient">
            <wellknown
               type="CarGeneralAsm.CarProvider, CarGeneralAsm"
               url="http://NameTheRemoteIISHost/IISCarHost/carprovider.soap"/>
         </client>
         <channels>
            <channel ref="http"/>
         </channels>
      </application>
   </system.runtime.remoting>
</configuration>
```

At this point, you are able to run your client application as before.

Asynchronous Remoting

To wrap things up, let's examine how to invoke members of a remote type asynchronously. In Chapter 14, you were first introduced to the topic of asynchronous method invocations using delegate types. As you would expect, if a client assembly wishes to call a remote object asynchronously,

the first step is to define a custom delegate to represent the remote method in question. At this point, the caller can make use of any of the techniques seen in Chapter 14 to invoke and receive the method return value.

By way of a simple illustration, create a new console application (AsyncWKOCarProviderClient) and set a reference to the first iteration of the `CarGeneralAsm.dll` assembly. Now, update the `Program` class as so:

```
class Program
{
     // The delegate for the GetAllAutos() method.
     internal delegate List<JamesBondCar> GetAllAutosDelegate();

     static void Main(string[] args)
     {
          Console.WriteLine("Client started!  Hit enter to end");
          RemotingConfiguration.Configure
               ("AsyncWKOCarProviderClient.exe.config");
          // Make the car provider.
          CarProvider cp = new CarProvider();

          // Make the delegate.
          GetAllAutosDelegate getCarsDel =
               new GetAllAutosDelegate(cp.GetAllAutos);
          // Call GetAllAutos() asynchronously.
          IAsyncResult ar = getCarsDel.BeginInvoke(null, null);

          // Simulate client-side activity.
          while(!ar.IsCompleted)
          { Console.WriteLine("Client working..."); }

          // All done!  Get return value from delegate.
          List<JamesBondCar> allJBCs = getCarsDel.EndInvoke(ar);

          // Use all cars in List.
          foreach(JamesBondCar j in allJBCs)
               UseCar(j);
          Console.ReadLine();
     }
}
```

Notice how the client application first declares a delegate that matches the signature of the `GetAllAutos()` method of the remote `CarProvider` type. When the delegate is created, you pass in the name of the method to call (`GetAllAutos`), as always. Next, you trigger the `BeginInvoke()` method, cache the resulting `IAsyncResult` interface, and simulate some work on the client side (recall that the `IAsyncResult.IsCompleted` property allows you to monitor if the associated method has completed processing). Finally, once the client's work has completed, you obtain the `List<>` returned from the `CarProvider.GetAllAutos()` method by invoking the `EndInvoke()` member, and pass each `JamesBondCar` into a static helper function named `UseCar()`:

```
public static void UseCar(JamesBondCar j)
{
    Console.WriteLine("Can car fly? {0}", j.isFlightWorthy);
    Console.WriteLine("Can car swim? {0}", j.isSeaWorthy);
}
```

Again, the beauty of the .NET delegate type is the fact that the logic used to invoke remote methods asynchronously is identical to the process of local method invocations.

■ **Source Code** The AsyncWKOCarProviderClient project is located under the Chapter 18 subdirectory.

The Role of the [OneWay] Attribute

Imagine that your `CarProvider` has a new method named `AddCar()`, which takes a `JamesBondCar` input parameter and returns nothing. The key point is that it returns *nothing*. As you might assume given the name of the `System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging.OneWayAttribute` class, the .NET remoting layer passes the call to the remote one-way method, but does *not* bother to set up the infrastructure used to return a given value (hence the name *one-way*). Here is the update:

```
// Home of the [OneWay] attribute.
using System.Runtime.Remoting.Messaging;
...
namespace CarGeneralAsm
{
     public class CarProvider : MarshalByRefObject
     {
...
          // The client can 'fire and forget' when calling this method.
          [OneWay]
          public void AddCar(JamesBondCar newJBC)
          { theJBCars.Add(newJBC);}
     }
}
```

Callers would invoke this method directly as always:

```
// Make the car provider.
CarProvider cp = new CarProvider();
// Add a new car.
cp.AddCar(new JamesBondCar("Zippy", 200, false, false));
```

From the client's point of view, the call to `AddCar()` is completely asynchronous, as the CLR will ensure that a background thread is used to remotely trigger the method. Given that `AddCar()` has been decorated with the `[OneWay]` attribute, the client is unable to obtain any return value from the call. Because `AddCar()` returns `void`, this is not an issue.

In addition to this restriction, also be aware that if you have a `[OneWay]` method that defines output or reference parameters (via the `out` or `ref` keyword), the caller will *not* be able to obtain the callee's modification(s). Furthermore, if the `[OneWay]` method happens to throw an exception (of any type), the caller is completely oblivious of this fact. In a nutshell, remote objects can mark select methods as `[OneWay]` to allow the caller to employ a fire-and-forget mentality.

Summary

In this chapter, you examined how to configure distinct .NET assemblies to share types between application boundaries. As you have seen, a remote object may be configured as an MBV or MBR type. This choice ultimately controls how a remote type is realized in the client's application domain (a copy or transparent proxy).

If you have configured a type to function as an MBR entity, you are suddenly faced with a number of related choices (WKO versus CAO, single call versus singleton, and so forth), each of which was addressed during this chapter. As well, you examined the process of tracking the lifetime of a remote object via the use of leases and lease sponsorship. Finally, you revisited of the role of the .NET delegate type to understand how to asynchronously invoke a remote method (which, as luck would have it, is identical to the process of asynchronously invoking a local type).

CHAPTER 19

Building a Better Window with System.Windows.Forms

If you have read through the previous 18 chapters, you should have a solid handle on the C# programming language as well as the foundation of the .NET architecture. While you could take your newfound knowledge and begin building the next generation of console applications (boring!), you are more likely to be interested in building an attractive graphical user interface (GUI) to allow users to interact with your system.

This chapter is the first of three aimed at introducing you to the process of building traditional form-based desktop applications. Here, you'll learn how to build a highly stylized main window using the `Form` and `Application` classes. This chapter also illustrates how to capture and respond to user input (i.e., handle mouse and keyboard events) within the context of a GUI desktop environment. Finally, you will learn to construct menu systems, toolbars, status bars, and multiple-document interface (MDI) applications, both by hand and using the designers incorporated into Visual Studio 2005.

Overview of the System.Windows.Forms Namespace

Like any namespace, `System.Windows.Forms` is composed of various classes, structures, delegates, interfaces, and enumerations. Although the difference in appearance between a console UI (CUI) and graphical UI (GUI) seems at first glance like night and day, in reality the process of building a Windows Forms application involves nothing more than learning how to manipulate a new set of types using the C# syntax you already know. From a high level, the hundreds of types within the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace can be grouped into the following broad categories:

- *Core infrastructure*: These are types that represent the core operations of a .NET Forms program (`Form`, `Application`, etc.) and various types to facilitate interoperability with legacy ActiveX controls.
- *Controls*: These are types used to create rich UIs (`Button`, `MenuStrip`, `ProgressBar`, `DataGridView`, etc.), all of which derive from the `Control` base class. Controls are configurable at design time and are visible (by default) at runtime.
- *Components*: These are types that do not derive from the `Control` base class but still provide visual features to a .NET Forms program (`ToolTip`, `ErrorProvider`, etc.). Many components (such as the `Timer`) are not visible at runtime, but can be configured visually at design time.
- *Common dialog boxes*: Windows Forms provides a number of canned dialog boxes for common operations (`OpenFileDialog`, `PrintDialog`, etc.). As you would hope, you can certainly build your own custom dialog boxes if the standard dialog boxes do not suit your needs.

Given that the total number of types within `System.Windows.Forms` is well over 100 strong, it would be redundant (not to mention a terrible waste of paper) to list every member of the Windows Forms family. To set the stage for the next several chapters, however, Table 19-1 lists some of the core .NET 2.0 `System.Windows.Forms` types (consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details).

Table 19-1. *Core Types of the* `System.Windows.Forms` *Namespace*

Classes	Meaning in Life
`Application`	This class encapsulates the runtime operation of a Windows Forms application.
`Button`, `CheckBox`, `ComboBox`, `DateTimePicker`, `ListBox`, `LinkLabel`, `MaskedTextBox`, `MonthCalendar`, `PictureBox`, `TreeView`	These classes (in addition to many others) correspond to various GUI widgets. You'll examine many of these items in detail in Chapter 21.
`FlowLayoutPanel`, `TableLayoutPanel`	.NET 2.0 now supplies various "layout managers" that automatically arrange a Form's controls during resizing.
`Form`	This type represents a main window, dialog box, or MDI child window of a Windows Forms application.
`ColorDialog`, `OpenFileDialog`, `SaveFileDialog`, `FontDialog`, `PrintPreviewDialog`, `FolderBrowserDialog`	These are various standard dialog boxes for common GUI operations.
`Menu`, `MainMenu`, `MenuItem`, `ContextMenu`, `MenuStrip`, `ContextMenuStrip`,	These types are used to build topmost and context-sensitive menu systems. The new (.NET 2.0) `MenuStrip` and `ContextMenuStrip` controls allow you to build menus that may contain traditional drop-down menu items as well as other controls (text boxes, combo boxes, and so forth).
`StatusBar`, `Splitter`, `ToolBar`, `ScrollBar`, `StatusStrip`, `ToolStrip`	These types are used to adorn a Form with common child controls.

■ **Note** In addition to `System.Windows.Forms`, the `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assembly defines additional GUI-centric namespaces. For the most part, these additional types are used internally by the Forms engine and/or the designer tools of Visual Studio 2005. Given this fact, we will keep focused on the core `System.Windows.Forms` namespace.

Working with the Windows Forms Types

When you build a Windows Forms application, you may choose to write all the relevant code by hand (using Notepad or TextPad, perhaps) and feed the resulting `*.cs` files into the C# compiler using the `/target:winexe` flag. Taking time to build some Windows Forms applications by hand not only is a great learning experience, but also helps you understand the code generated by the various graphics designers found within various .NET IDEs.

To make sure you truly understand the basic process of building a Windows Forms application, the initial examples in this chapter will avoid the use of graphics designers. Once you feel comfortable with the process of building a Windows Forms application "wizard-free," you will then leverage the various designer tools provided by Visual Studio 2005.

Building a Main Window by Hand

To begin learning about Windows Forms programming, you'll build a minimal main window from scratch. Create a new folder on your hard drive (e.g., C:\MyFirstWindow) and create a new file within this directory named `MainWindow.cs` using your editor of choice.

In the world of Windows Forms, the `Form` class is used to represent any window in your application. This includes a topmost main window in a single-document interface (SDI) application, modeless and modal dialog boxes, and the parent and child windows of a multiple-document interface (MDI) application. When you are interested in creating and displaying the main window in your program, you have two mandatory steps:

1. Derive a new class from `System.Windows.Forms.Form`.
2. Configure your application's `Main()` method to invoke `Application.Run()`, passing an instance of your `Form`-derived type as an argument.

Given this, update your `MainWindow.cs` file with the following class definition:

```
using System;
using System.Windows.Forms;

namespace MyWindowsApp
{
     public class MainWindow : Form
     {
          // Run this application and identify the main window.
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               Application.Run(new MainWindow());
          }
     }
}
```

In addition to the always present `mscorlib.dll`, a Windows Forms application needs to reference the `System.dll` and `System.Windows.Forms.dll` assemblies. As you may recall from Chapter 2, the default C# response file (`csc.rsp`) instructs `csc.exe` to automatically include these assemblies during the compilation process, so you are good to go. Also recall that the `/target:winexe` option of `csc.exe` instructs the compiler to generate a Windows executable.

■ **Note** Technically speaking, you can build a Windows application at the command line using the `/target:exe` option; however, if you do, you will find that a command window will be looming in the background (and it will stay there until you shut down the main window). When you specify `/target:winexe`, your executable runs as a native Windows Forms application (without the looming command window).

To compile your C# code file, open a Visual Studio 2005 command prompt and issue the following command:

```
csc /target:winexe *.cs
```

Figure 19-1 shows a test run.

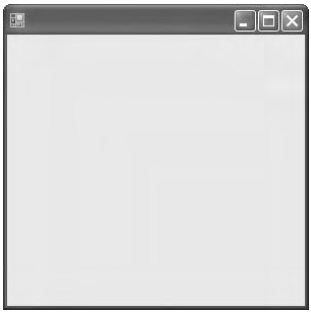


Figure 19-1. *A simple main window à la Windows Forms*

Granted, the Form is not altogether that interesting at this point. But simply by deriving from `Form`, you have a minimizable, maximizable, resizable, and closable main window (with a default system-supplied icon to boot!). Unlike other Microsoft GUI frameworks you may have used in the past (Microsoft Foundation Classes, in particular), there is no need to bolt in hundreds of lines of coding infrastructure (frames, documents, views, applications, or message maps). Unlike a C-based Win32 API Windows application, there is no need to manually implement `WinProc()` or `WinMain()` procedures. Under the .NET platform, those dirty details have been encapsulated within the `Form` and `Application` types.

Honoring the Separation of Concerns

Currently, the `MainWindow` class defines the `Main()` method directly within its scope. If you prefer, you may create a second static class (I named mine `Program`) that is responsible for the task of launching the main window, leaving the `Form`-derived class responsible for representing the window itself:

```
namespace MyWindowsApp
{
    // The main window.
    public class MainWindow : Form { }

    // The application object.
    public static class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
             // Don't forget to 'use' System.Windows.Forms!
            Application.Run(new MainWindow());
        }
    }
}
```

By doing so, you are abiding by an OO principal termed *the separation of concerns*. Simply put, this rule of OO design states that a class should be in charge of doing the least amount of work possible. Given that you have refactored the initial class into two unique classes, you have decoupled the Form from the class that creates it. The end result is a more portable window, as it can be dropped into any project without carrying the extra baggage of a project-specific `Main()` method.

■ **Source Code** The MyFirstWindow project can be found under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

The Role of the Application Class

The `Application` class defines numerous static members that allow you to control various low-level behaviors of a Windows Forms application. For example, the `Application` class defines a set of events that allow you to respond to events such as application shutdown and idle-time processing. In addition to the `Run()` method, here are some other methods to be aware of:

- `DoEvents()`: Provides the ability for an application to process messages currently in the message queue during a lengthy operation.
- `Exit()`: Terminates the Windows application and unloads the hosting AppDomain.
- `EnableVisualStyles()`: Configures your application to support Windows XP visual styles. Do note that if you enable XP styles, this method must be called before loading your main window via `Application.Run()`.

The `Application` class also defines a number of properties, many of which are read-only in nature. As you examine Table 19-2, note that most of these properties represent an "application-level" trait such as company name, version number, and so forth. In fact, given what you already know about assembly-level attributes (see Chapter 12), many of these properties should look vaguely familiar.

Table 19-2. *Core Properties of the* `Application` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`CompanyName`	Retrieves the value of the assembly-level `[AssemblyCompany]` attribute
`ExecutablePath`	Gets the path for the executable file
`ProductName`	Retrieves the value of the assembly-level `[AssemblyProduct]` attribute
`ProductVersion`	Retrieves the value of the assembly-level `[AssemblyVersion]` attribute
`StartupPath`	Retrieves the path for the executable file that started the application

Finally, the `Application` class defines various static events, some of which are as follows:

- `ApplicationExit`: Occurs when the application is just about to shut down
- `Idle`: Occurs when the application's message loop has finished processing the current batch of messages and is about to enter an idle state (as there are no messages to process at the current time)
- `ThreadExit`: Occurs when a thread in the application is about to terminate

Fun with the Application Class

To illustrate some of the functionality of the `Application` class, let's enhance your current `MainWindow` to perform the following:

- Reflect over select assembly-level attributes.
- Handle the static `ApplicationExit` event.

The first task is to make use of select properties in the `Application` class to reflect over some assembly-level attributes. To begin, add the following attributes to your `MainWindow.cs` file (note you are now `using` the `System.Reflection` namespace):

```
using System;
using System.Windows.Forms;
using System.Reflection;
```

```
// Some attributes regarding this assembly.
[assembly:AssemblyCompany("Intertech Training")]
[assembly:AssemblyProduct("A Better Window")]
[assembly:AssemblyVersion("1.1.0.0")]

namespace MyWindowsApp
{
   ...
}
```

Rather than manually reflecting over the `[AssemblyCompany]` and `[AssemblyProduct]` attributes using the techniques illustrated in Chapter 12, the `Application` class will do so automatically using various static properties. To illustrate, implement the default constructor of `MainForm` as so:

```
public class MainWindow : Form
{
    public MainWindow()
    {
        MessageBox.Show(Application.ProductName,
            string.Format("This app brought to you by {0}",
            Application.CompanyName));
    }
}
```

When you run this application, you'll see a message box that displays various bits of information (see Figure 19-2).



Figure 19-2. *Reading attributes via the* `Application` *type*

Now, let's equip this Form to respond to the `ApplicationExit` event. When you wish to respond to events from within a Windows Forms application, you will be happy to find that the same event syntax detailed in Chapter 8 is used to handle GUI-based events. Therefore, if you wish to intercept the static `ApplicationExit` event, simply register an event handler using the `+=` operator:

```
public class MainForm : Form
{
     public MainForm()
     {
          ...
          // Intercept the ApplicationExit event.
          Application.ApplicationExit += new EventHandler(MainWindow_OnExit);
     }
     private void MainWindow_OnExit(object sender, EventArgs evArgs)
     {
            MessageBox.Show(string.Format("Form version {0} has terminated.",
                Application.ProductVersion));
     }
}
```

The System.EventHandler Delegate

Notice that the `ApplicationExit` event works in conjunction with the `System.EventHandler` delegate. This delegate must point to methods that conform to the following signature:

```
delegate void EventHandler(object sender, EventArgs e);
```

`System.EventHandler` is the most primitive delegate used to handle events within Windows Forms, but many variations do exist for other events. As far as `EventHandler` is concerned, the first parameter of the assigned method is of type `System.Object`, which represents the object sending the event. The second `EventArgs` parameter (or a descendent thereof) contains any relevant information regarding the current event.

■ **Note** `EventArgs` is the base class to numerous derived types that contain information for a family of related events. For example, mouse events work with the `MouseEventArgs` parameter, which contains details such as the (*x*, *y*) position of the cursor. Many keyboard events work with the `KeyEventArgs` type, which contains details regarding the current keypress, and so forth.

In any case, if you now recompile and run the application, you will find your message box appear upon the termination of the application.

■ **Source Code** The AppClassExample project can be found under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

The Anatomy of a Form

Now that you understand the role of the `Application` type, the next task is to examine the functionality of the `Form` class itself. Not surprisingly, the `Form` class inherits a great deal of functionality from its parent classes. Figure 19-3 shows the inheritance chain (including the set of implemented interfaces) of a `Form`-derived type using the Visual Studio 2005 Object Browser.

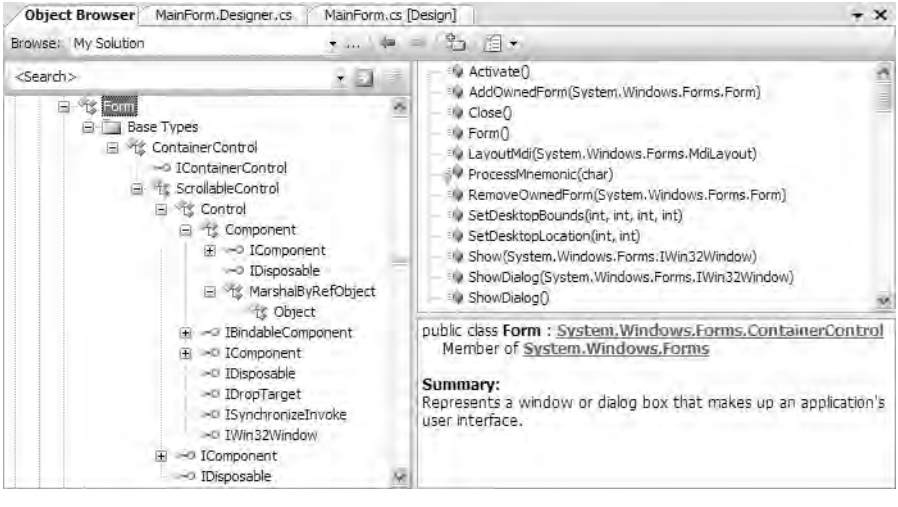


Figure 19-3. *The derivation of the* `Form` *type*

Although the complete derivation of a `Form` type involves numerous base classes and interfaces, do understand that you are *not* required to learn the role of each and every member from each and every parent class or implemented interface to be a proficient Windows Forms developer. In fact, the majority of the members (properties and events in particular) you will use on a daily basis are easily set using the Visual Studio 2005 IDE Properties window. Before we move on to examine some specific members inherited from these parent classes, Table 19-3 outlines the basic role of each base class.

Table 19-3. *Base Classes in the* `Form` *Inheritance Chain*

Parent Class	Meaning in Life
`System.Object`	Like any class in .NET, a Form "is-a" object.
`System.MarshalByRefObject`	Recall during our examination of .NET remoting (see Chapter 18) that types deriving from this class are accessed remotely via a *reference* (not a copy) of the remote type.
`System.ComponentModel.Component`	This class provides a default implementation of the `IComponent` interface. In the .NET universe, a component is a type that supports design-time editing, but is not necessarily visible at runtime.
`System.Windows.Forms.Control`	This class defines common UI members for all Windows Forms UI controls, including the `Form` type itself.
`System.Windows.Forms.ScrollableControl`	This class defines support for auto-scrolling behaviors.
`System.Windows.Forms.ContainerControl`	This class provides focus-management functionality for controls that can function as a container for other controls.
`System.Windows.Forms.Form`	This class represents any custom Form, MDI child, or dialog box.

As you might guess, detailing each and every member of each class in the `Form`'s inheritance chain would require a large book in itself. However, it is important to understand the behavior supplied by the `Control` and `Form` types. I'll assume that you will spend time examining the full details behind each class at your leisure using the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

The Functionality of the Control Class

The `System.Windows.Forms.Control` class establishes the common behaviors required by any GUI type. The core members of `Control` allow you to configure the size and position of a control, capture keyboard and mouse input, get or set the focus/visibility of a member, and so forth. Table 19-4 defines some (but not all) properties of interest, grouped by related functionality.

Table 19-4. *Core Properties of the* `Control` *Type*

Properties	Meaning in Life
`BackColor`, `ForeColor`, `BackgroundImage`, `Font`, `Cursor`	These properties define the core UI of the control (colors, font for text, mouse cursor to display when the mouse is over the widget, etc.).
`Anchor`, `Dock`, `AutoSize`	These properties control how the control should be positioned within the container.
`Top`, `Left`, `Bottom`, `Right`, `Bounds`, `ClientRectangle`, `Height`, `Width`	These properties specify the current dimensions of the control.
`Enabled`, `Focused`, `Visible`	These properties each return a Boolean that specifies the state of the current control.
`ModifierKeys`	This static property checks the current state of the modifier keys (Shift, Ctrl, and Alt) and returns the state in a `Keys` type.
`MouseButtons`	This static property checks the current state of the mouse buttons (left, right, and middle mouse buttons) and returns this state in a `MouseButtons` type.
`TabIndex`, `TabStop`	These properties are used to configure the tab order of the control.
`Opacity`	This property determines the opacity of the control, in fractions (0.0 is completely transparent; 1.0 is completely opaque).
`Text`	This property indicates the string data associated with this control.
`Controls`	This property allows you to access a strongly typed collection (`ControlsCollection`) that contains any child controls within the current control.

As you would guess, the `Control` class also defines a number of events that allow you to intercept mouse, keyboard, painting, and drag-and-drop activities (among other things). Table 19-5 lists some (but not all) events of interest, grouped by related functionality.

Table 19-5. *Events of the* `Control` *Type*

Events	Meaning in Life
`Click`, `DoubleClick`, `MouseEnter`, `MouseLeave`, `MouseDown`, `MouseUp`, `MouseMove`, `MouseHover`, `MouseWheel`	Various events that allow you to interact with the mouse
`KeyPress`, `KeyUp`, `KeyDown`	Various events that allow you to interact with the keyboard
`DragDrop`, `DragEnter`, `DragLeave`, `DragOver`	Various events used to monitor drag-and-drop activity
`Paint`	This event allows you to interact with GDI+ (see Chapter 20)

Finally, the `Control` base class also defines a number of methods that allow you to interact with any `Control`-derived type. As you examine the methods of the `Control` type, you will notice that a good number of them have an `On` prefix followed by the name of a specific event (`OnMouseMove`, `OnKeyUp`, `OnPaint`, etc.). Each of these `On`-prefixed virtual methods is the default event handler for its respective event. If you override any of these virtual members, you gain the ability to perform any necessary pre- or postprocessing of the event before (or after) invoking your parent's default implementation:

```
public class MainWindow : Form
{
    protected override void OnMouseDown(MouseEventArgs e)
    {
        // Add code for MouseDown event.

        // Call parent implementation when finished.
        base.OnMouseDown(e);
    }
}
```

While this can be helpful in some circumstances (especially if you are building a custom control that derives from a standard control; see Chapter 21), you will often handle events using the standard C# event syntax (in fact, this is the default behavior of the Visual Studio 2005 designers). When you do so, the framework will call your custom event handler once the parent's implementation has completed:

```
public class MainWindow : Form
{
    public MainWindow()
    {
        MouseDown += new MouseEventHandler(MainWindow_MouseDown);
    }

    void MainWindow_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
    {
        // Add code for MouseDown event.
    }
}
```

Beyond these `OnXXX()` methods, here are a few other methods to be aware of:

- `Hide()`: Hides the control and sets the `Visible` property to false
- `Show()`: Shows the control and sets the `Visible` property to true
- `Invalidate()`: Forces the control to redraw itself by sending a `Paint` event

To be sure, the `Control` class does define additional properties, methods, and events beyond the subset you've just examined. You should, however, now have a solid understanding regarding the overall functionality of this base class. Let's see it in action.

Fun with the Control Class

To illustrate the usefulness of some members from the `Control` class, let's build a new Form that is capable of handling the following events:

- Respond to the `MouseMove` and `MouseDown` events.
- Capture and process keyboard input via the `KeyUp` event.

To begin, create a new class derived from `Form`. In the default constructor, you'll make use of various inherited properties to establish the initial look and feel. Note you're now `using` the `System.Drawing` namespace to gain access to the `Color` structure (you'll examine this namespace in detail in the next chapter):

```
using System;
using System.Windows.Forms;
using System.Drawing;
```

```
namespace MyWindowsApp
{
    public class MainWindow : Form
    {
        public MainWindow()
        {
            // Use inherited properties to set basic UI.
            Text = "My Fantastic Form";
            Height = 300;
            Width = 500;
            BackColor = Color.LemonChiffon;
            Cursor = Cursors.Hand;
        }
    }

    public static class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            Application.Run(new MainWindow());
        }
    }
}
```

Compile your application at this point, just to make sure you have not injected any typing errors:

```
csc /target:winexe *.cs
```

Responding to the MouseMove Event

Next, you need to handle the `MouseMove` event. The goal is to display the current (*x*, *y*) location within the Form's caption area. All mouse-centric events (`MouseMove`, `MouseUp`, etc.) work in conjunction with the `MouseEventHandler` delegate, which can call any method matching the following signature:

```
void MyMouseHandler(object sender, MouseEventArgs e);
```

The incoming `MouseEventArgs` structure extends the general `EventArgs` base class by adding a number of members particular to the processing of mouse activity (see Table 19-6).

Table 19-6. *Properties of the* `MouseEventArgs` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Button`	Gets which mouse button was pressed, as defined by the `MouseButtons` enumeration
`Clicks`	Gets the number of times the mouse button was pressed and released
`Delta`	Gets a signed count of the number of detents the mouse wheel has rotated
`X`	Gets the *x*-coordinate of a mouse click
`Y`	Gets the *y*-coordinate of a mouse click

Here, then, is the updated `MainForm` class that handles the `MouseMove` event as intended:

```
public class MainForm : Form
{
     public MainForm()
     {
```

```
            ...
            // Handle the MouseMove event
            MouseMove += new MouseEventHandler(MainForm_MouseMove);
        }
        // MouseMove event handler.
        public void MainForm_MouseMove(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
        {
           Text = string.Format("Current Pos: ({0}, {1})", e.X, e.Y);
        }
}
```

If you now run your program and move the mouse over your Form, you will find the current (*x*, *y*) value display on the caption area (see Figure 19-4).

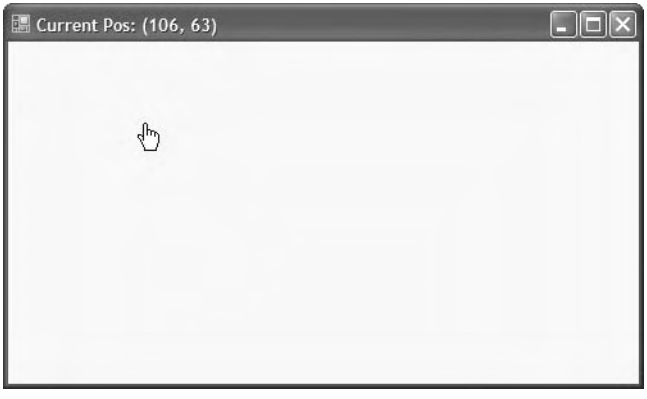


Figure 19-4. *Monitoring mouse movement*

Determining Which Mouse Button Was Clicked

One thing to be aware of is that the `MouseUp` (or `MouseDown`) event is sent whenever *any* mouse button is clicked. If you wish to determine exactly *which* button was clicked (such as left, right, or middle), you need to examine the `Button` property of the `MouseEventArgs` class. The value of the `Button` property is constrained by the related `MouseButtons` enumeration. Assume you have updated your default constructor to handle the `MouseUp` event as so:

```
public MainWindow()
{
...
    // Handle the MouseUp event.
    MouseUp += new MouseEventHandler(MainForm_MouseUp);
}
```

The following `MouseUp` event handler displays which mouse button was clicked inside a message box:

```
public void MainForm_MouseUp (object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
{
     // Which mouse button was clicked?
     if(e.Button == MouseButtons.Left)
          MessageBox.Show("Left click!");
     if(e.Button == MouseButtons.Right)
```

```
            MessageBox.Show("Right click!");
        if (e.Button == MouseButtons.Middle)
            MessageBox.Show("Middle click!");
}
```

Responding to Keyboard Events

Processing keyboard input is almost identical to responding to mouse activity. The `KeyUp` and `KeyDown` events work in conjunction with the `KeyEventHandler` delegate, which can point to any method taking an object as the first parameter and `KeyEventArgs` as the second:

```
void MyKeyboardHandler(object sender, KeyEventArgs e);
```

`KeyEventArgs` has the members of interest shown in Table 19-7.

Table 19-7. *Properties of the* `KeyEventArgs` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Alt`	Gets a value indicating whether the Alt key was pressed
`Control`	Gets a value indicating whether the Ctrl key was pressed
`Handled`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the event was fully handled in your handler
`KeyCode`	Gets the keyboard code for a `KeyDown` or `KeyUp` event
`Modifiers`	Indicates which modifier keys (Ctrl, Shift, and/or Alt) were pressed
`Shift`	Gets a value indicating whether the Shift key was pressed

Update your `MainForm` to handle the `KeyUp` event. Once you do, display the name of the key that was pressed inside a message box using the `KeyCode` property.

```
public class MainForm : Form
{
    public MainForm()
    {
        ...
        // Listen for the KeyUp Event.
        KeyUp += new KeyEventHandler(MainForm_KeyUp);
    }
    private void MainForm_KeyUp (object sender, KeyEventArgs e)
    {
        MessageBox.Show(e.KeyCode.ToString(), "Key Pressed!");
    }
}
```

Now compile and run your program. You should be able to determine not only which mouse button was clicked, but also which keyboard key was pressed.

That wraps up our look at the core functionality of the `Control` base class. Next up, let's check out the role of `Form`.

■ **Source Code** The ControlBehaviors project is included under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

The Functionality of the Form Class

The `Form` class is typically (but not necessarily) the direct base class for your custom `Form` types. In addition to the large set of members inherited from the `Control`, `ScrollableControl`, and `ContainerControl` classes, the `Form` type adds additional functionality in particular to main windows, MDI child windows, and dialog boxes. Let's start with the core properties in Table 19-8.

Table 19-8. *Properties of the* `Form` *Type*

Properties	Meaning in Life
`AcceptButton`	Gets or sets the button on the Form that is clicked when the user presses the Enter key.

`ActiveMDIChild`
`IsMDIChild`
`IsMDIContainer`
	Used within the context of an MDI application.

`CancelButton`	Gets or sets the button control that will be clicked when the user presses the Esc key.
`ControlBox`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the Form has a control box.
`FormBorderStyle`	Gets or sets the border style of the Form. Used in conjunction with the `FormBorderStyle` enumeration.
`Menu`	Gets or sets the menu to dock on the Form.
`MaximizeBox` `MinimizeBox`	Used to determine if this Form will enable the maximize and minimize boxes.
`ShowInTaskbar`	Determines if this Form will be seen on the Windows taskbar.
`StartPosition`	Gets or sets the starting position of the Form at runtime, as specified by the `FormStartPosition` enumeration.
`WindowState`	Configures how the Form is to be displayed on startup. Used in conjunction with the `FormWindowState` enumeration.

In addition to the expected `On`-prefixed default event handlers, Table 19-9 gives a list of some core methods defined by the `Form` type.

Table 19-9. *Key Methods of the* `Form` *Type*

Method	Meaning in Life
`Activate()`	Activates a given Form and gives it focus.
`Close()`	Closes a Form.
`CenterToScreen()`	Places the Form in the dead-center of the screen.
`LayoutMDI()`	Arranges each child Form (as specified by the `LayoutMDI` enumeration) within the parent Form.
`ShowDialog()`	Displays a Form as a modal dialog box. More on dialog box programming in Chapter 21.

Finally, the `Form` class defines a number of events, many of which fire during the form's lifetime. Table 19-10 hits the highlights.

Table 19-10. *Select Events of the* `Form` *Type*

Events	Meaning in Life
`Activated`	Occurs whenever the Form is *activated*, meaning the Form has been given the current focus on the desktop
`Closed`, `Closing`	Used to determine when the Form is about to close or has closed
`Deactivate`	Occurs whenever the Form is *deactivated*, meaning the Form has lost current focus on the desktop
`Load`	Occurs after the Form has been allocated into memory, but is not yet visible on the screen
`MDIChildActive`	Sent when a child window is activated

The Life Cycle of a Form Type

If you have programmed user interfaces using GUI toolkits such as Java Swing, Mac OS X Cocoa, or the raw Win32 API, you are aware that "window types" have a number of events that fire during their lifetime. The same holds true for Windows Forms. As you have seen, the life of a Form begins when the type constructor is called prior to being passed into the `Application.Run()` method.

Once the object has been allocated on the managed heap, the framework fires the `Load` event. Within a `Load` event handler, you are free to configure the look and feel of the Form, prepare any contained child controls (such as `ListBoxes`, `TreeViews`, and whatnot), or simply allocate resources used during the Form's operation (database connections, proxies to remote objects, and whatnot).

Once the `Load` event has fired, the next event to fire is `Activated`. This event fires when the Form receives focus as the active window on the desktop. The logical counterpart to the `Activated` event is (of course) `Deactivate`, which fires when the Form loses focus as the active window. As you can guess, the `Activated` and `Deactivate` events can fire numerous times over the life of a given `Form` type as the user navigates between active applications.

When the user has chosen to close the Form in question, two close-centric events fire: `Closing` and `Closed`. The `Closing` event is fired first and is an ideal place to prompt the end user with the much hated (but useful) "Are you *sure* you wish to close this application?" message. This confirmational step is quite helpful to ensure the user has a chance to save any application-centric data before terminating the program.

The `Closing` event works in conjunction with the `CancelEventHandler` delegate defined in the `System.ComponentModel` namespace. If you set the `CancelEventArgs.Cancel` property to true, you prevent the Form from being destroyed and instruct it to return to normal operation. If you set `CancelEventArgs.Cancel` to false, the `Close` event fires and the Windows Forms application terminates, which unloads the AppDomain and terminates the process.

To solidify the sequence of events that take place during a Form's lifetime, assume you have a new `MainWindow.cs` file that handles the `Load`, `Activated`, `Deactivate`, `Closing`, and `Close` events within the class constructor (be sure to add a `using` directive for the `System.ComponentModel` namespace to obtain the definition of `CancelEventArgs`):

```
public MainForm()
{
     // Handle various lifetime events.
     Closing += new CancelEventHandler(MainForm_Closing);
     Load += new EventHandler(MainForm_Load);
     Closed += new EventHandler(MainForm_Closed);
     Activated += new EventHandler(MainForm_Activated);
     Deactivate += new EventHandler(MainForm_Deactivate);
}
```

In the `Load`, `Closed`, `Activated`, and `Deactivate` event handlers, you are going to update the value of a new Form-level `System.String` member variable (named `lifeTimeInfo`) with a simple message that displays the name of the event that has just been intercepted. As well, notice that within the `Closed` event handler, you will display the value of this string within a message box:

```
private void MainForm_Load(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{ lifeTimeInfo += "Load event\n"; }
private void MainForm_Activated(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{ lifeTimeInfo += "Activate event\n"; }
private void MainForm_Deactivate(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{ lifeTimeInfo += "Deactivate event\n"; }
private void MainForm_Closed(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
    lifeTimeInfo += "Closed event\n";
    MessageBox.Show(lifeTimeInfo);
}
```

Within the `Closing` event handler, you will prompt the user to ensure she wishes to terminate the application using the incoming `CancelEventArgs`:

```
private void MainForm_Closing(object sender, CancelEventArgs e)
{
    DialogResult dr = MessageBox.Show("Do you REALLY want to close this app?",
        "Closing event!", MessageBoxButtons.YesNo);
    if (dr == DialogResult.No)
        e.Cancel = true;
    else
        e.Cancel = false;
}
```

Notice that the `MessageBox.Show()` method returns a `DialogResult` type, which has been set to a value representing the button clicked by the end user (`Yes` or `No`). Now, compile your code at the command line:

```
csc /target:winexe *.cs
```

Now run your application and shift the Form into and out of focus a few times (to trigger the `Activated` and `Deactivate` events). Once you shut down the Form, you will see a message box that looks something like Figure 19-5.



Figure 19-5. *The life and times of a* `Form`*-derived type*

Now, most of the really interesting aspects of the `Form` type have to do with its ability to create and host menu systems, toolbars, and status bars. While the code to do so is not complex, you will be happy to know that Visual Studio 2005 defines a number of graphical designers that take care of

most of the mundane code on your behalf. Given this, let's say good-bye to the command-line compiler for the time being and turn our attention to the process of building Windows Forms applications using Visual Studio 2005.

■ **Source Code** The FormLifeTime project can be found under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

Building Windows Applications with Visual Studio 2005

Visual Studio 2005 has a specific project type dedicated to the creation of Windows Forms applications. When you select the Windows Application project type, you not only receive an application object with a proper `Main()` method, but also are provided with an initial `Form`-derived type. Better yet, the IDE provides a number of graphical designers that make the process of building a UI child's play. Just to learn the lay of the land, create a new Windows Application project workspace (see Figure 19-6). You are not going to build a working example just yet, so name this project whatever you desire.

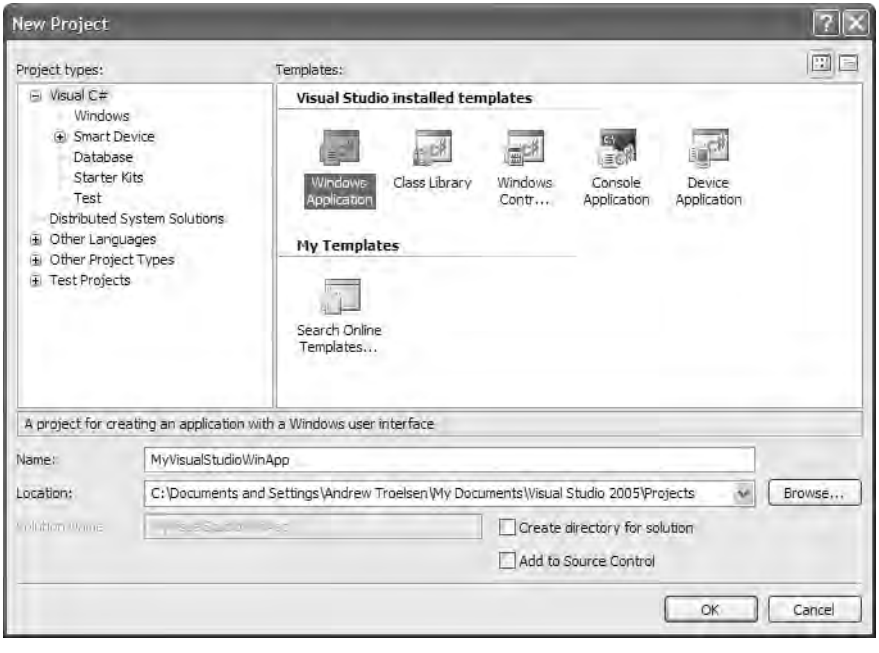


Figure 19-6. *The Visual Studio 2005 Windows Application project*

Once the project has loaded, you will no doubt notice the Forms designer, which allows you to build a UI by dragging controls/components from the Toolbox (see Figure 19-7) and configuring their properties and events using the Properties window (see Figure 19-8).



Figure 19-7. *The Visual Studio 2005 Toolbox*



Figure 19-8. *The Visual Studio 2005 Properties window*

As you can see, the Toolbox groups UI controls by various categories. While most are self-explanatory (e.g., Printing contains printing controls, Menus & Toolbars contains recommended menu/toolbar controls, etc.), a few categories deserve special mention:

- *Common Controls*: Members in this category are considered the "recommended set" of common UI controls.
- *All Windows Forms*: Here you will find the full set of Windows Forms controls, including various .NET 1.*x* controls that are considered depreciated.

The second bullet point is worth reiterating. If you have worked with Windows Forms using .NET 1.*x*, be aware that many of your old friends (such as the `DataGrid` control) have been placed under the All Windows Forms category. Furthermore, the common UI controls you may have used under .NET 1.*x* (such as `MainMenu`, `ToolBar`, and `StatusBar`) are *not* shown in the Toolbox by default.

Enabling the Deprecated Controls

The first bit of good news is that these (deprecated) UI elements are still completely usable under .NET 2.0. The second bit of good news is that if you still wish to program with them, you can add them back to the Toolbox by right-clicking anywhere in the Toolbox and selecting Choose Items. From the resulting dialog box, check off the items of interest (see Figure 19-9).

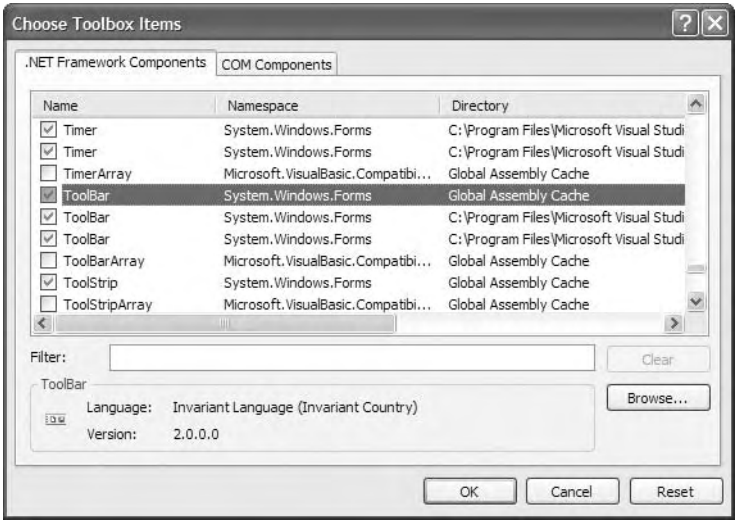


Figure 19-9. *Adding additional controls to the Toolbox*

■ **Note** At first glance, it might appear that there are redundant listings for a given control (such as the `ToolBar`). In reality, each listing is unique, as a control may be versioned (1.0 versus 2.0) and/or may be a member of the .NET Compact Framework. Be sure to examine the directory path to select the correct item.

At this point, I am sure you are wondering why many of these old standbys have been hidden from view. The reason is that .NET 2.0 provides a set of new menu, toolbar, and status bar–centric controls that are now favored. For example, rather than using the legacy `MainMenu` control to build a menu, you can use the `MenuStrip` control, which provides a number of new bells and whistles in addition to the functionality found within `MainMenu`.

■ **Note** In this chapter, I will favor the use of this new recommend set of UI elements. If you wish to work with the legacy `MainMenu`, `StatusBar`, or `ToolBar` types, consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Dissecting a Visual Studio 2005 Windows Forms Project

Each `Form` in a Visual Studio 2005 Windows Application project is composed of two related C# files, which can be verified using Solution Explorer (see Figure 19-10).

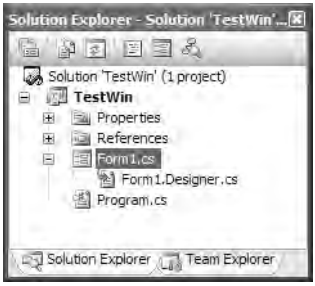


Figure 19-10. *Each Form is composed of two* `*.cs` *files.*

Right-click the `Form1.cs` icon and select View Code. Here you will see a partial class that contains all of the Form's event handlers, constructors, overrides, and any member you author yourself (note that I renamed this initial class from `Form1` to `MainWindow` using the `Rename` refactoring):

```
namespace MyVisualStudioWinApp
{
    public partial class MainWindow : Form
    {
        public MainWindow()
        {
            InitializeComponent();
        }
    }
}
```

The default constructor of your Form makes a call to a method named `InitializeComponent()`, which is defined within the related `*.Designer.cs` file. This method is maintained on your behalf by Visual Studio 2005, and it contains all of the code representing your design-time modifications.

To illustrate, switch back to the Forms designer and locate the `Text` property in the Properties window. Change this value to something like **My Test Window**. Now open your `Form1.Designer.cs` file and notice that `InitializeComponent()` has been updated accordingly:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    this.Text = "My Test Window";
}
```

In addition to maintaining `InitializeComponent()`, the `*.Designer.cs` file will define the member variables that represent each control placed on the designer. Again, to illustrate, drag a `Button` control onto the Forms designer. Now, using the Properties window, rename your member variable from `button1` to `btnTestButton` via the `Name` property.

■ **Note** It is always a good idea to rename the controls you place on the designer before handling events. If you fail to do so, you will most likely end up with a number of nondescript event handlers, such as `button27_Click`, given that the default names simply suffix a numerical value to the variable name.

Handling Events at Design Time

Notice that the Properties window has a button depicting a lightning bolt. Although you are always free to handle Form-level events by authoring the necessary logic by hand (as done in the previous examples), this event button allows you to visually handle an event for a given control. Simply select the control you wish to interact with from the drop-down list box (mounted at the top of the Properties window), locate the event you are interested in handling, and type in the name to be used as an event handler (or simply double-click the event to generate a default name of the form `ControlName_EventName`).

Assuming you have handled the `Click` event for the `Button` control, you will find that the `Form1.cs` file contains the following event handler:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    public MainWindow()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
    }
    private void btnButtonTest_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
}
```

As well, the `Form1.Designer.cs` file contains the necessary infrastructure and member variable declaration:

```
partial class MainWindow
{
...
    private void InitializeComponent()
    {
...
        this.btnButtonTest.Click +=
            new System.EventHandler(this.btnButtonTest_Click);
    }
    private System.Windows.Forms.Button btnButtonTest;
}
```

■ **Note** Every control has a *default event*, which refers to the event that will be handled if you double-click the item on the control using the Forms designer. For example, a Form's default event is `Load`, and if you double-click anywhere on a Form type, the IDE will automatically write code to handle this event.

The Program Class

Beyond the Form-centric files, a Visual Studio 2005 Windows application defines a second class that represents the application object (e.g., the type defining the `Main()` method). Notice that the `Main()` method has been configured to call `Application.EnableVisualStyles()` as well as `Application.Run()`:

```
static class Program
{
    [STAThread]
    static void Main()
    {
        Application.EnableVisualStyles();
```

```
        Application.Run(new MainWindow());
    }
}
```

■ **Note** The `[STAThread]` attribute instructs the CLR to host any legacy COM objects (including ActiveX controls) in a *single-threaded apartment* (*STA*). If you have a background in COM, you may recall that the STA was used to ensure access to a COM type occurred in a synchronous (hence, thread-safe) manner.

Autoreferenced Assemblies

Finally, if you examine Solution Explorer, you will notice that a Windows Forms project automatically references a number of assemblies, including `System.Windows.Forms.dll` and `System.Drawing.dll`. Again, the details of `System.Drawing.dll` will be examined in the next chapter.

Working with MenuStrips and ContextMenuStrips

As of .NET 2.0, the recommended control for building a menu system is `MenuStrip`. This control allows you to create "normal" menu items such as File ➤ Exit, and you may also configure it to contain any number of relevant controls within the menu area. Here are some common UI elements that may be contained within a `MenuStrip`:

- `ToolStripMenuItem`: A traditional menu item
- `ToolStripComboBox`: An embedded `ComboBox`
- `ToolStripSeparator`: A simple line that separates content
- `ToolStripTextBox`: An embedded `TextBox`

Programmatically speaking, the `MenuStrip` control contains a strongly typed collection named `ToolStripItemCollection`. Like other collection types, this object supports members such as `Add()`, `AddRange()`, `Remove()`, and the `Count` property. While this collection is typically populated indirectly using various design-time tools, you are able to manually manipulate this collection if you so choose.

To illustrate the process of working with the `MenuStrip` control, create a new Windows Forms application named MenuStripApp. Using the Forms designer, place a `MenuStrip` control named `mainMenuStrip` onto your Form. When you do so, your `*.Designer.cs` file is updated with a new `MenuStrip` member variable:

```
private System.Windows.Forms.MenuStrip mainMenuStrip;
```

`MenuStrip`s can be highly customized using the Visual Studio 2005 Forms designer. For example, if you look at the extreme upper-left of the control, you will notice a small arrow icon. After you select this icon, you are presented with a context-sensitive "inline editor," as shown in Figure 19-11.

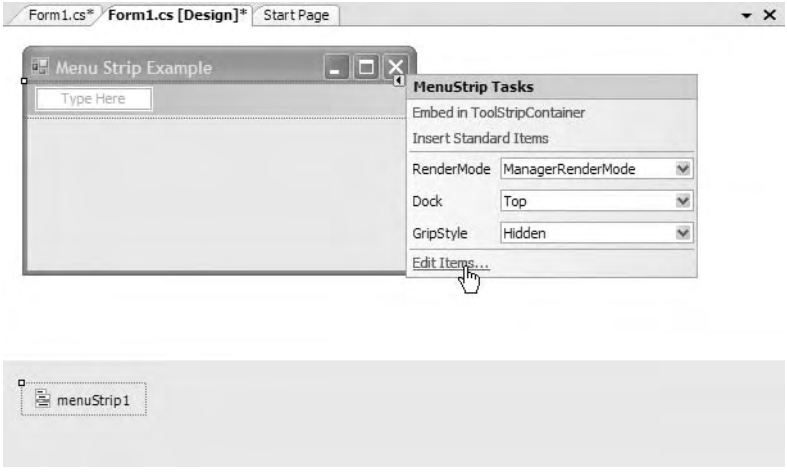


Figure 19-11. *The inline* `MenuStrip` *editor*

Many Windows Forms controls support such context-sensitive inline editors. As far as `MenuStrip` is concerned, the editor allows you to quickly do the following:

- Insert a "standard" menu system (File, Save, Tools, Help, etc.) using the Insert Standard Items link.
- Change the docking and gripping behaviors of the `MenuStrip`.
- Edit each item in the `MenuStrip` (this is simply a shortcut to selecting a specific item in the Properties window).

For this example, you'll ignore the options of the inline editor and stay focused on the design of the menu system. To begin, select the `MenuStrip` control on the designer and define a standard File ➤ Exit menu by typing in the names within the Type Here prompts (see Figure 19-12).



Figure 19-12. *Designing a menu system*

Note As you may know, when the ampersand character (&) is placed before a letter in a menu item, it denotes the item's shortcut key. In this example, you are creating &File ➤ E&xit; therefore, the user may activate the Exit menu by pressing Alt+f, and then x.

Each menu item you type into the designer is represented by the `ToolStripMenuItem` class type. If you open your `*.Designer.cs` file, you will find two new member variables for each item:

```
partial class MainWindow
{
...
    private System.Windows.Forms.MenuStrip mainMenuStrip;
    private System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripMenuItem fileToolStripMenuItem;
    private System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripMenuItem exitToolStripMenuItem;
}
```

When you use the menu editor, the `InitializeComponent()` method is updated accordingly. Notice that the `MenuStrip`'s internal `ToolStripItemCollection` has been updated to contain the new topmost menu item (`fileToolStripMenuItem`). In a similar fashion, the `fileToolStripMenuItem` variable has been updated to insert the `exitToolStripMenuItem` variable into its `ToolStripItemCollection` collection via the `DropDownItems` property:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    //
    // menuStrip1
    //
    this.menuStrip1.Items.AddRange(new System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripItem[] {
      this.fileToolStripMenuItem});
   ...
    //
    // fileToolStripMenuItem
    //
    this.fileToolStripMenuItem.DropDownItems.AddRange(new
      System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripItem[] {
       this.exitToolStripMenuItem});
...
    //
    // MainWindow
    //
    this.Controls.Add(this.menuStrip1);
}
```

Last but not least, notice that the `MenuStrip` control is inserted to the Form's controls collection. This collection will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 21, but for the time being, just know that in order for a control to be visible at runtime, it must be a member of this collection.

To finish the initial code of this example, return to the designer and handle the `Click` event for the Exit menu item using the events button of the Properties window. Within the generated event handler, make a call to `Application.Exit`:

```
private void exitToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    Application.Exit();
}
```

At this point, you should be able to compile and run your program. Verify that you can terminate the application via File ➤ Exit as well as pressing Alt+f and then x on the keyboard.

Adding a TextBox to the MenuStrip

Now, let's create a new topmost menu item named Change Background Color. The subitem in this case will not be a menu item, but a `ToolStripTextBox` (see Figure 19-13). Once you have added the new control, rename this control to `toolStripTextBoxColor` using the Properties window.

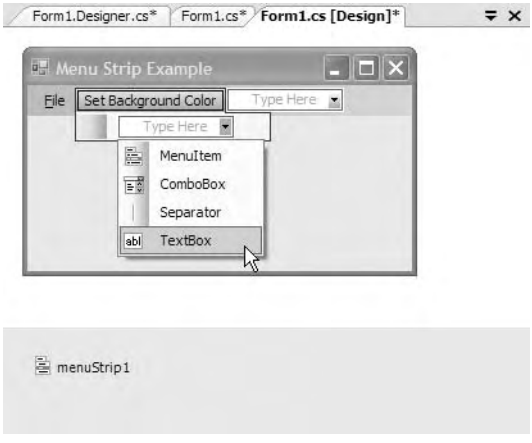


Figure 19-13. *Adding* `TextBox`*es to a* `MenuStrip`

The goal here is to allow the user to enter the name of a color (red, green, pink, etc.) that will be used to set the `BackColor` property of the Form. First, handle the `LostFocus` event on the new `ToolStripTextBox` member variable within the Form's constructor (as you would guess, this event fires when the `TextBox` within the `ToolStrip` is no longer the active UI element):

```
public MainWindow()
{
...
    toolStripTextBoxColor.LostFocus
        += new EventHandler(toolStripTextBoxColor_LostFocus);
}
```

Within the generated event handler, you will extract the string data entered within the `ToolStripTextBox` (via the `Text` property) and make use of the `System.Drawing.Color.FromName()` method. This static method will return a `Color` type based on a known string value. To account for the possibility that the user enters an unknown color (or types bogus data), you will make use of some simple `try/catch` logic:

```
void toolStripTextBoxColor_LostFocus(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    try
    {
        BackColor = Color.FromName(toolStripTextBoxColor.Text);
    } catch { } // Just do nothing if the user provides bad data.
}
```

Go ahead and take your updated application out for another test drive and try entering in the names of various colors. Once you do, you should see your Form's background color change. If you are interested in checking out some valid color names, look up the `System.Drawing.Color` type using the Visual Studio 2005 Object Browser or the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Creating a Context Menu

Let's now examine the process of building a context-sensitive pop-up (i.e., right-click) menu. Under .NET 1.1, the `ContextMenu` type was the class of choice for building context menus, but under .NET 2.0 the preferred type is `ContextMenuStrip`. Like the `MenuStrip` type, `ContextMenuStrip` maintains a `ToolStripItemCollection` to represent the possible subitems (such as `ToolStripMenuItem`, `ToolStripComboBox`, `ToolStripSeperator`, `ToolStripTextBox`, etc.).

Drag a new `ContextMenuStrip` control from the Toolbox onto the Forms designer and rename the control to `fontSizeContextStrip` using the Properties window. Notice that you are able to populate the subitems graphically in much the same way you would edit the Form's main `MenuStrip` (a welcome change from the method used in Visual Studio .NET 2003). For this example, add three `ToolStripMenuItems` named `Huge`, `Normal`, and `Tiny` (see Figure 19-14).

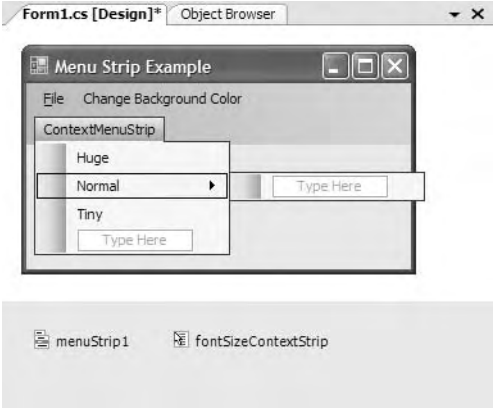


Figure 19-14. *Designing a* `ContextMenuStrip`

This context menu will be used to allow the user to select the size to render a message within the Form's client area. To facilitate this endeavor, create an enum type named `TextFontSize` within the `MenuStripApp` namespace and declare a new member variable of this type within your `Form` type (set to `TextFontSize.FontSizeNormal`):

```
namespace MainForm
{
    // Helper enum for font size.
    enum TextFontSize
    {
        FontSizeHuge = 30,
        FontSizeNormal = 20,
        FontSizeTiny = 8
    }

    public class MainForm : Form
    {
```

```
        // Current size of font.
        private TextFontSize currFontSize
             = TextFontSize.FontSizeNormal;
...
    }
}
```

The next step is to handle the Form's `Paint` event using the Properties window. As described in greater detail in the next chapter, the `Paint` event allows you to render graphical data (including stylized text) onto a Form's client area. Here, you are going to draw a textual message using a font of user-specified size. Don't sweat the details at this point, but do update your `Paint` event handler as so:

```
private void MainWindow_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    g.DrawString("Right click on me...",
            new Font("Times New Roman", (float)currFontSize),
            new SolidBrush(Color.Black), 50, 50);
}
```

Last but not least, you need to handle the `Click` events for each of the `ToolStripMenuItem` types maintained by the `ContextMenuStrip`. While you could have a separate `Click` event handler for each, you will simply specify a single event handler that will be called when any of the three `ToolStripMenuItems` have been clicked. Using the Properties window, specify the name of the `Click` event handler as `ContextMenuItemSelection_Clicked` for each of the three `ToolStripMenuItems` and implement this method as so:

```
private void ContextMenuItemSelection_Clicked(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Obtain the currently clicked ToolStripMenuItem.
    ToolStripMenuItem miClicked =
        miClicked = (ToolStripMenuItem)sender;

    // Figure out which item was clicked using its Name.
    if (miClicked.Name == "hugeToolStripMenuItem")
        currFontSize = TextFontSize.FontSizeHuge;
    if (miClicked.Name == "normalToolStripMenuItem")
        currFontSize = TextFontSize.FontSizeNormal;
    if (miClicked.Name == "tinyToolStripMenuItem")
        currFontSize = TextFontSize.FontSizeTiny;

    // Tell the Form to repaint itself.
    Invalidate();
}
```

Notice that using the "sender" argument, you are able to determine the name of the `ToolStripMenuItem` member variable in order to set the current text size. Once you have done so, the call to `Invalidate()` fires the `Paint` event, which will cause your `Paint` event handler to execute.

The final step is to inform the Form which `ContextMenuStrip` it should display when the right mouse button is clicked in its client area. To do so, simply use the Properties window to set the `ContextMenuStrip` property equal to the name of your context menu item. Once you have done so, you will find the following line within `InitializeComponent()`:

```
this.ContextMenuStrip = this.fontSizeContextStrip;
```

■ **Note** Be aware that *any* control can be assigned a context menu via the `ContextMenuStrip` property. For example, you could create a `Button` object on a dialog box that responds to a particular context menu. In this way, the menu would be displayed only if the mouse button were right-clicked within the bounding rectangle of the button.

If you now run the application, you should be able to change the size of the rendered text message via a right-click of your mouse.

Checking Menu Items

`ToolStripMenuItem` defines a number of members that allow you to check, enable, and hide a given item. Table 19-11 gives a rundown of some (but not all) of the interesting properties.

Table 19-11. *Members of the* `ToolStripMenuItem` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`Checked`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether a check mark appears beside the text of the `ToolStripMenuItem`
`CheckOnClick`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the `ToolStripMenuItem` should automatically appear checked/unchecked when clicked
`Enabled`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the `ToolStripMenuItem` is enabled

Let's extend the previous pop-up menu to display a check mark next to the currently selected menu item. Setting a check mark on a given menu item is not at all difficult (just set the `Checked` property to true). However, tracking which menu item should be checked does require some additional logic. One possible approach is to define a distinct `ToolStripMenuItem` member variable that represents the currently checked item:

```
public class MainWindow : Form
{
...
    // Marks the item checked.
    private ToolStripMenuItem currentCheckedItem;
}
```

Recall that the default text size is `TextFontSize.FontSizeNormal`. Given this, the initial item to be checked is the `normalToolStripMenuItem` `ToolStripMenuItem` member variable. Update your Form's constructor as so:

```
public MainWindow()
{
    // Inherited method to center the Form.
    CenterToScreen();
    InitializeComponent();

    // Now check the 'Normal' menu item.
    currentCheckedItem = normalToolStripMenuItem;
    currentCheckedItem.Checked = true;
}
```

Now that you have a way to programmatically identify the currently checked item, the last step is to update the `ContextMenuItemSelection_Clicked()` event handler to uncheck the previous item and check the new current `ToolStripMenuItem` object in response to the user selection:

```
private void ContextMenuItemSelection_Clicked(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Uncheck the currently checked item.
    currentCheckedItem.Checked = false;
...
    if (miClicked.Name == "hugeToolStripMenuItem")
    {
        currFontSize = TextFontSize.FontSizeHuge;
        currentCheckedItem = hugeToolStripMenuItem;
    }
    if (miClicked.Name == "normalToolStripMenuItem")
    {
        currFontSize = TextFontSize.FontSizeNormal;
        currentCheckedItem = normalToolStripMenuItem;
    }
    if (miClicked.Name == "tinyToolStripMenuItem")
    {
        currFontSize = TextFontSize.FontSizeTiny;
        currentCheckedItem = tinyToolStripMenuItem;
    }
    // Check new item.
    currentCheckedItem.Checked = true;
...
}
```

Figure 19-15 shows the completed MenuStripApp project in action.



Figure 19-15. *Checking/unchecking* `ToolStripMenuItem`*s*

■ **Source Code** The MenuStripApp application is located under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

Working with StatusStrips

In addition to a menu system, many Forms also maintain a *status bar* that is typically mounted at the bottom of the Form. A status bar may be divided into any number of "panes" that hold some textual (or graphical) information such as menu help strings, the current time, or other application-specific information.

Although status bars have been supported since the release of the .NET platform (via the `System.Windows.Forms.StatusBar` type), as of .NET 2.0 the simple `StatusBar` has been ousted by the new `StatusStrip` type. Like a status bar, a `StatusStrip` can consist of any number of panes to hold textual/graphical data using a `ToolStripStatusLabel` type. However, status strips have the ability to contain additional tool strip items such as the following:

- `ToolStripProgressBar`: An embedded progress bar.
- `ToolStripDropDownButton`: An embedded button that displays a drop-down list of choices when clicked.
- `ToolStripSplitButton`: This is similar to the `ToolStripDropDownButton`, but the items of the drop-down list are displayed only if the user clicks directly on the drop-down area of the control. The `ToolStripSplitButton` also has normal buttonlike behavior and can thus support the `Click` event.

In this example, you will build a new `MainWindow` that supports a simple menu (File ➤ Exit and Help ➤ About) as well as a `StatusStrip`. The leftmost pane of the status strip will be used to display help string data regarding the currently selected menu subitem (e.g., if the user selects the Exit menu, the pane will display "Exits the app").

The far right pane will display one of two dynamically created strings that will show either the current time or the current date. Finally, the middle pane will be a `ToolStripDropDownButton` type that allows the user to toggle the date/time display (with a happy face icon to boot!). Figure 19-16 shows the application in its completed form.

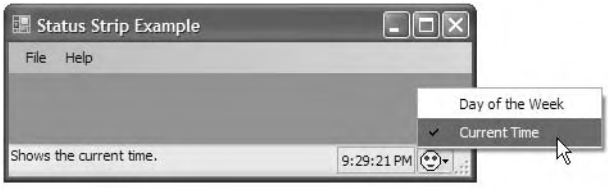


Figure 19-16. *The* `StatusStrip` *application*

Designing the Menu System

To begin, create a new Windows Forms application project named StatusStripApp. Place a `MenuStrip` control onto the Forms designer and build the two menu items (File ➤ Exit and Help ➤ About). Once you have done so, handle the `Click` and `MouseHover` events for each subitem (Exit and About) using the Properties window.

The implementation of the File ➤ Exit `Click` event handler will simply terminate the application, while the Help ➤ About `Click` event handler shows a friendly `MessageBox`.

```
private void exitToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{ Application.Exit(); }

private void aboutToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{ MessageBox.Show("My StatusStripApp!"); }
```

You will update the `MouseHover` event handler to display the correct prompt in the leftmost pane of the `StatusStrip` in just a bit, so leave them empty for the time being.

Designing the StatusStrip

Next, place a `StatusStrip` control onto the designer and rename this control to `mainStatusStrip`. Understand that by default a `StatusStrip` contains no panes whatsoever. To add the three panes, you may take various approaches:

- Author the code by hand without designer support (perhaps using a helper method named `CreateStatusStrip()` that is called in the Form's constructor).
- Add the items via a dialog box activated using the Edit Items link using the `StatusStrip` context-sensitive inline editor (see Figure 19-17).
- Add the items one by one via the new item drop-down editor mounted on the `StatusStrip` (see Figure 19-18).

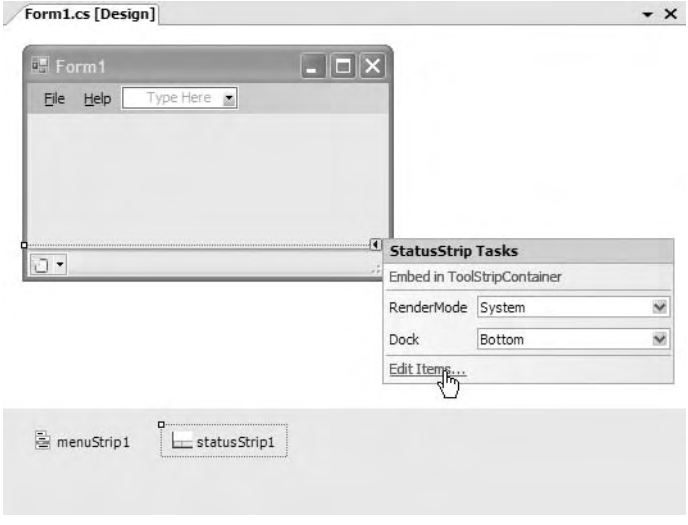


Figure 19-17. *The* `StatusStrip` *context editor*

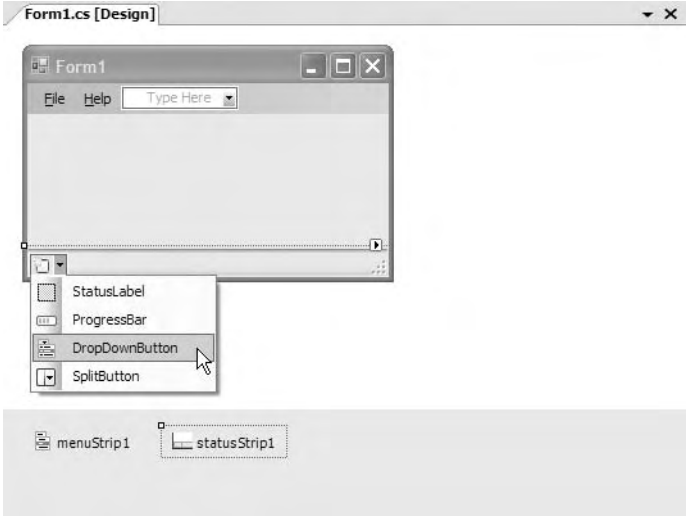


Figure 19-18. *Adding items via the* `StatusStrip` *new item drop-down editor*

For this example, you will leverage the new item drop-down editor. Add two new `ToolStripStatusLabel` types named `toolStripStatusLabelMenuState` and `toolStripStatusLabelClock`, and a `ToolStripDropDownButton` named `toolStripDropDownButtonDateTime`. As you would expect, this will add new member variables in the `*.Designer.cs` file and update `InitializeComponent()` accordingly. Note that the `StatusStrip` maintains an internal collection to hold each of the panes:

```
partial class MainForm
{
    private void InitializeComponent()
    {
...
    //
    // mainStatusStrip
    //
    this.mainStatusStrip.Items.AddRange(new System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripItem[] {
        this.toolStripStatusLabelMenuState,
        this.toolStripStatusLabelClock,
        this.toolStripDropDownButtonDateTime});
...
    }

    private System.Windows.Forms.StatusStrip mainStatusStrip;
    private System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripStatusLabel
        toolStripStatusLabelMenuState;
    private System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripStatusLabel
        toolStripStatusLabelClock;
    private System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripDropDownButton
        toolStripDropDownButtonDateTime;
...
}
```

Now, select the `ToolStripDropDownButton` on the designer and add two new menu items named `currentTimeToolStripMenuItem` and `dayoftheWeekToolStripMenuItem` (see Figure 19-19).

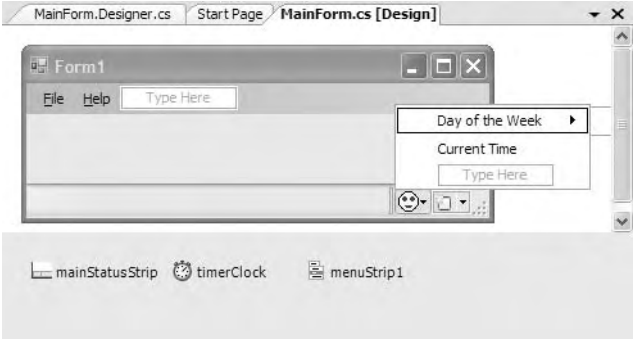


Figure 19-19. *Adding menu items to the* `ToolStripDropDownButton`

To configure your panes to reflect the look and feel shown in Figure 19-19, you will need to set several properties, which you do using the Visual Studio 2005 Properties window. Table 19-12 documents the necessary properties to set and events to handle for each item on your `StatusStrip` (of course, feel free to stylize the panes with additional settings as you see fit).

Table 19-12. `StatusStrip` *Pane Configuration*

Pane Member Variable	Properties to Set	Events to Handle

`toolStripStatusLabelMenuState`	`Spring = true`
	`Text = (empty)`
	`TextAlign = TopLeft`
		None

`toolStripStatusLabelClock`	`BorderSides = All` `Text = (empty)`	None
`toolStripDropDownButtonDateTime`	`Image` = (see text that follows)	None
`dayoftheWeekToolStripMenuItem`	`Text` = "Day of the Week"	`MouseHover` `Click`
`currentTimeToolStripMenuItem`	`Text` = "Current Time"	`MouseHover` `Click`

The `Image` property of the `toolStripDropDownButtonDateTime` member can be set to any image file on your machine (of course, extremely large image files will be quite skewed). For this example, you may wish to use the `happyDude.bmp` file included with this book's downloadable source code (please visit the Downloads section of the Apress website, `http://www.apress.com`).

So at this point, the GUI design is complete! Before you implement the remaining event handlers, you need to get to know the role of the `Timer` component.

Working with the Timer Type

Recall that the second pane should display the current time or current date based on user preference. The first step to take to achieve this design goal is to add a `Timer` member variable to the Form. A `Timer` is a component that calls some method (specified using the `Tick` event) at a given interval (specified by the `Interval` property).

Drag a `Timer` component onto your Forms designer and rename it to `timerDateTimeUpdate`. Using the Properties window, set the `Interval` property to 1,000 (the value in milliseconds) and set the `Enabled` property to true. Finally, handle the `Tick` event. Before implementing the `Tick` event handler, define a new enum type in your project named `DateTimeFormat`. This enum will be used to determine whether the second `ToolStripStatusLabel` should display the current time or the current day of the week:

```
enum DateTimeFormat
{
    ShowClock,
    ShowDay
}
```

With this enum in place, update your `MainWindow` with the following code:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    // Which format to display?
    DateTimeFormat dtFormat = DateTimeFormat.ShowClock;
...
    private void timerDateTimeUpdate_Tick(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        string panelInfo = "";

        // Create current format.
        if (dtFormat == DateTimeFormat.ShowClock)
            panelInfo = DateTime.Now.ToLongTimeString();
```

```
        else
            panelInfo = DateTime.Now.ToLongDateString();

        // Set text on pane.
        toolStripStatusLabelClock.Text = panelInfo;
    }
}
```

Notice that the `Timer` event handler makes use of the `DateTime` type. Here, you simply find the current system time or date using the `Now` property and use it to set the `Text` property of the `toolStripStatusLabelClock` member variable.

Toggling the Display

At this point, the `Tick` event handler should be displaying the current time within the `toolStripStatusLabelClock` pane, given that the default value of your `DateTimeFormat` member variable as been set to `DateTimeFormat.ShowClock`. To allow the user to toggle between the date and time display, update your `MainWindow` as so (note you are also toggling which of the two menu items in the `ToolStripDropDownButton` should be checked):

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    // Which format to display?
    DateTimeFormat dtFormat = DateTimeFormat.ShowClock;

    // Marks the item checked.
    private ToolStripMenuItem currentCheckedItem;

    public MainWindow()
    {
        InitializeComponent();

        // These properties can also be set
        // with the Properties window.
        Text = "Status Strip Example";
        CenterToScreen();
        BackColor = Color.CadetBlue;
        currentCheckedItem = currentTimeToolStripMenuItem;
        currentCheckedItem.Checked = true;
    }
...
    private void currentTimeToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Toggle check mark and set pane format to time.
        currentCheckedItem.Checked = false;
        dtFormat = DateTimeFormat.ShowClock;
        currentCheckedItem = currentTimeToolStripMenuItem;
        currentCheckedItem.Checked = true;
    }
    private void dayoftheWeekToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Toggle check mark and set pane format to date.
        currentCheckedItem.Checked = false;
        dtFormat = DateTimeFormat.ShowDay;
        currentCheckedItem = dayoftheWeekToolStripMenuItem;
        currentCheckedItem.Checked = true;
    }
}
```

Displaying the Menu Selection Prompts

Finally, you need to configure the first pane to hold menu help strings. As you know, most applications send a small bit of text information to the first pane of a status bar whenever the end user selects a menu item (e.g., "This terminates the application"). Given that you have already handled the `MouseHover` events for each submenu on the `MenuStrip` and `TooStripDropDownButton`, all you need to do is assign a proper value to the `Text` property for the `toolStripStatusLabelMenuState` member variable, for example:

```
private void exitToolStripMenuItem_MouseHover(object sender, EventArgs e)
{ toolStripStatusLabelMenuState.Text = "Exits the app."; }

private void aboutToolStripMenuItem_MouseHover(object sender, EventArgs e)
{ toolStripStatusLabelMenuState.Text = "Shows about box."; }

private void dayoftheWeekToolStripMenuItem_MouseHover(object sender, EventArgs e)
{ toolStripStatusLabelMenuState.Text = "Shows the day of the week."; }

private void currentTimeToolStripMenuItem_MouseHover(object sender, EventArgs e)
{ toolStripStatusLabelMenuState.Text = "Shows the current time."; }
```

Take your updated project out for a test drive. You should now be able to find these informational help strings in the first pane of your `StatusStrip` as you select each menu item.

Establishing a "Ready" State

The final thing to do for this example is ensure that when the user deselects a menu item, the first text pane is set to a default message (e.g., "Ready"). With the current design, the previously selected menu prompt remains on the leftmost text pane, which is confusing at best. To rectify this issue, handle the `MouseLeave` event for the Exit, About, Day of the Week, and Current Time menu items. *However*, rather than generating a new event handler for each item, have them all call a method named `SetReadyPrompt()`:

```
private void SetReadyPrompt(object sender, EventArgs e)
{  toolStripStatusLabelMenuState.Text = "Ready."; }
```

With this, you should find that the first pane resets to this default message as soon as the mouse cursor leaves any of your four menu items.

■ **Source Code** The StatusBarApp project is included under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

Working with ToolStrips

The next Form-level GUI item to examine in this chapter is the .NET 2.0 `ToolStrip` type, which overshadows the functionality found within the depreciated .NET 1.*x* `ToolBar` class. As you know, toolbars typically provide an alternate means to activate a given menu item. Thus, if the user clicks a Save button, this has the same effect as selecting File ➤ Save. Much like `MenuStrip` and `StatusStrip`, the `ToolStrip` type can contain numerous toolbar items, some of which you have already encountered in previous examples:

- `ToolStripButton`
- `ToolStripLabel`
- `ToolStripSplitButton`

- ToolStripDropDownButton
- ToolStripSeparator
- ToolStripComboBox
- ToolStripTextBox
- ToolStripProgressBar

Like other Windows Forms controls, the ToolStrip supports an inline editor that allows you to quickly add standard button types (File, Exit, Help, Copy, Paste, etc.) to a ToolStrip, change the docking position, and embed the ToolStrip in a ToolStripContainer (more details in just a bit). Figure 19-20 illustrates the designer support for ToolStrips.

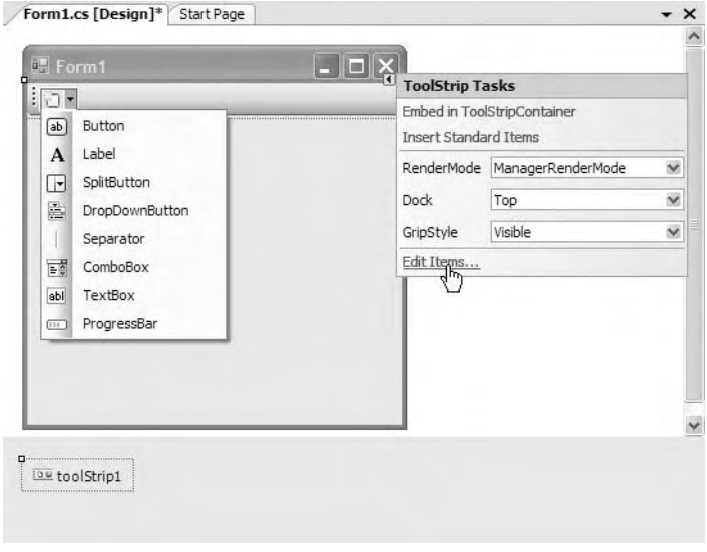


Figure 19-20. *Designing* ToolStrips

Like MenuStrips and StatusStrips, individual ToolStrip controls are added to the ToolStrip's internal collection via the Items property. If you click the Insert Standard Items link on the inline ToolStrip editor, your InitializeComponent() method is updated to insert an array of ToolStripItem-derived types that represent each item:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // Autogenerated code to prep a ToolStrip.
    this.toolStrip1.Items.AddRange(new System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripItem[] {
        this.newToolStripButton, this.openToolStripButton,
        this.saveToolStripButton, this.printToolStripButton,
        this.toolStripSeparator, this.cutToolStripButton,
        this.copyToolStripButton, this.pasteToolStripButton,
        this.toolStripSeparator1, this.helpToolStripButton});
...
}
```

To illustrate working with `ToolStrips`, the following Windows Forms application creates a `ToolStrip` containing two `ToolStripButton` types (named `toolStripButtonGrowFont` and `toolStripButtonShrinkFont`), a `ToolBarSeparator`, and a `ToolBarTextBox` (named `toolStripTextBoxMessage`).

The end user is able to enter a message to be rendered on the Form via the `ToolBarTextBox`, and the two `ToolBarButton` types will be used to increase or decrease the font size. Figure 19-21 shows the end result of the project you will construct.

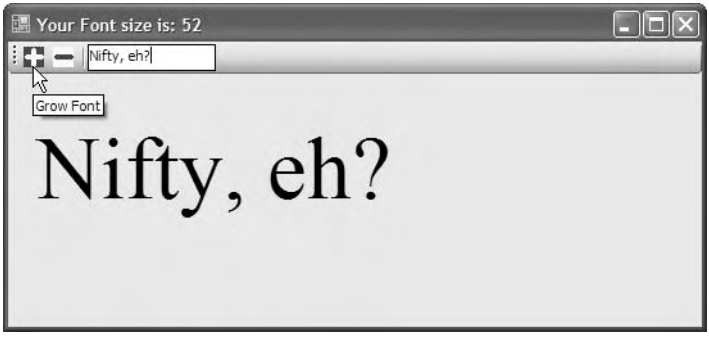


Figure 19-21. *ToolStripApp in action*

By now I'd guess you have a handle on working with the Visual Studio 2005 Forms designer, so I won't belabor the point of building the `ToolStrip`. Do note, however, that each `ToolStripButton` has a custom (albeit poorly drawn by yours truly) icon that was created using the Visual Studio 2005 image editor. If you wish to create image files for your project, simply select the Project ➤ Add New Item menu option, and from the resulting dialog box add a new icon file (see Figure 19-22).

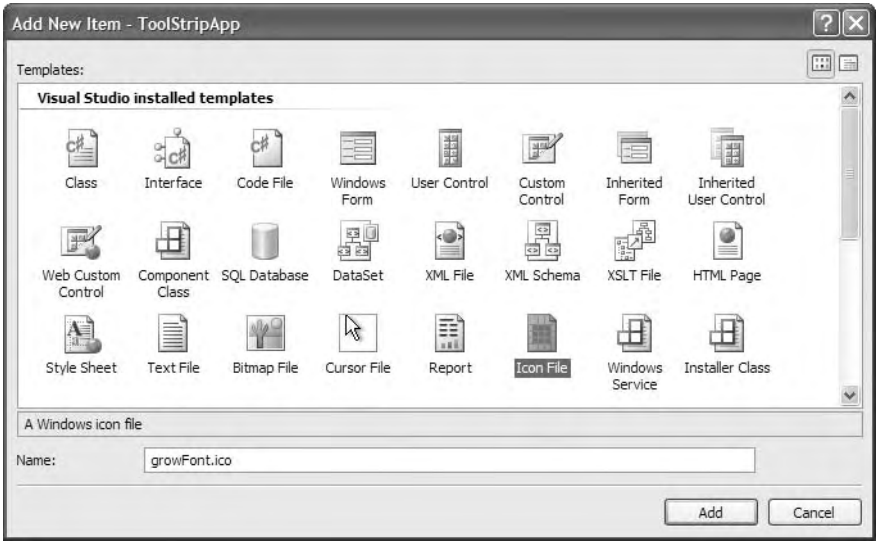


Figure 19-22. *Inserting new image files*

Once you have done so, you are able to edit your images using the Colors tab on the Toolbox and the Image Editor toolbox. In any case, once you have designed your icons, you are able to associate them with the `ToolStripButton` types via the `Image` property in the Properties window. Once you are happy with the `ToolStrip`'s look and feel, handle the `Click` event for each `ToolStripButton`.

Here is the relevant code in the `InitializeComponent()` method for the first `ToolStripButton` type (the second `ToolStripButton` will look just about the same):

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // toolStripButtonGrowFont
    //
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.DisplayStyle =
        System.Windows.Forms.ToolStripItemDisplayStyle.Image;
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.Image =
    ((System.Drawing.Image)
    (resources.GetObject("toolStripButtonGrowFont.Image")));
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.ImageTransparentColor =
        System.Drawing.Color.Magenta;
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.Name = "toolStripButtonGrowFont";
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.Text = "toolStripButton2";
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.ToolTipText = "Grow Font";
    this.toolStripButtonGrowFont.Click += new
        System.EventHandler(this.toolStripButtonGrowFont_Click);
...
}
```

■ **Note** Notice that the value assigned to the `Image` of a `ToolStripButton` is obtained using a method named `GetObject()`. As explained in the next chapter, this method is used to extract embedded resources used by your assembly.

The remaining code is extremely straightforward. In the following updated `MainWindow`, notice that the current font size is constrained between 12 and 70:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    // The current, max and min font sizes.
    int currFontSize = 12;
    const int MinFontSize = 12;
    const int MaxFontSize = 70;

    public MainWindow()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
        CenterToScreen();
        Text = string.Format("Your Font size is: {0}", currFontSize);
    }

    private void toolStripButtonShrinkFont_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Reduce font size by 5 and refresh display.
        currFontSize -= 5;
        if (currFontSize <= MinFontSize)
            currFontSize = MinFontSize;
```

```
        Text = string.Format("Your Font size is: {0}", currFontSize);
        Invalidate();
    }

    private void toolStripButtonGrowFont_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Increase font size by 5 and refresh display.
        currFontSize += 5;
        if (currFontSize >= MaxFontSize)
            currFontSize = MaxFontSize;
        Text = string.Format("Your Font size is: {0}", currFontSize);
        Invalidate();
    }

    private void MainWindow_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        // Paint the user-defined message.
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        g.DrawString(toolStripTextBoxMessage.Text,
            new Font("Times New Roman", currFontSize),
            Brushes.Black, 10, 60);
    }
}
```

As a final enhancement, if you wish to ensure that the user message is updated as soon as the `ToolStripTextBox` loses focus, you can handle the `LostFocus` event and `Invalidate()` your Form within the generated event handler:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
...
    public MainWindow()
    {
...
        this.toolStripTextBoxMessage.LostFocus
            += new EventHandler(toolStripTextBoxMessage_LostFocus);
    }
    void toolStripTextBoxMessage_LostFocus(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        Invalidate();
    }
...
}
```

Working with ToolStripContainers

`ToolStrips`, if required, can be configured to be "dockable" against any or all sides of the Form that contains it. To illustrate how you can accomplish this, right-click your current `ToolStrip` using the designer and select the Embed in ToolStripContainer menu option. Once you have done so, you will find that the `ToolStrip` has been contained within a `ToolStripContainer`. For this example, select the Dock Fill in Form option (see Figure 19-23).

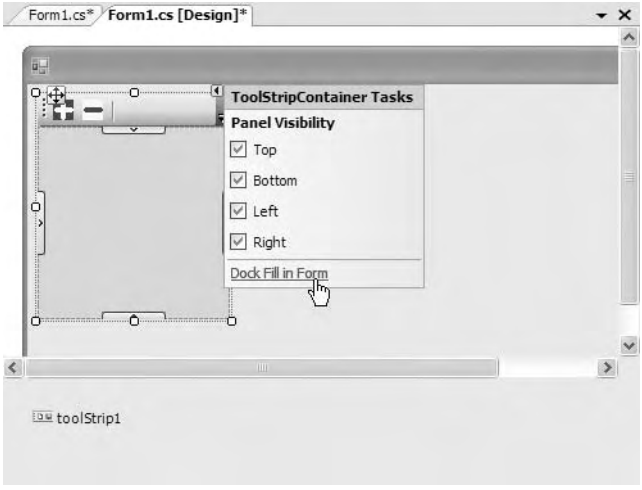


Figure 19-23. *Docking the* `ToolStripContainer` *within the entire Form*

If you run your current update, you will find that the `ToolStrip` can be moved and docked to each side of the container. However, your custom message has now vanished. The reason for this is that `ToolStripContainer`s are actually *child controls* of the Form. Therefore, the graphical render is still taking place, but the output is being hidden by the container that now sits on top of the Form's client area.

To fix this problem, you will need to handle the `Paint` event on the `ToolStripContainer` rather than on the Form. First, locate the Form's `Paint` event within the Properties window and right-click the current event handler. From the context menu, select Reset (see Figure 19-24).

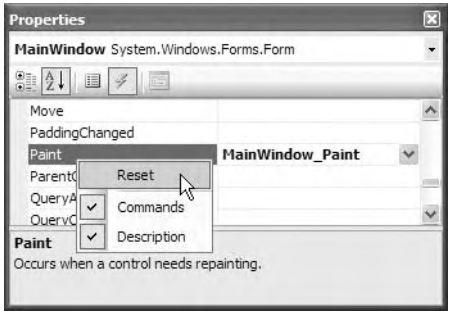


Figure 19-24. *Resetting an event*

This will remove the event handling logic in `InitializeComponent()`, but it will leave the event handler in place (just to ensure you don't lose code you would like to maintain).

Now, handle the `Paint` event for the `ToolStripContainer` and move the rendering code from the existing Form's `Paint` event handler into the container's `Paint` event handler. Once you have done so, you can delete the (now empty) `MainWindow_Paint()` method. Finally, you will need to replace each occurrence of the call to the Form's `Invalidate()` method to the container's `Invalidate()` method. Here are the relevant code updates:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
...
    void toolStripTextBoxMessage_LostFocus(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        toolStripContainer1.Invalidate(true);
    }

    private void toolStripButtonShrinkFont_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
...
        toolStripContainer1.Invalidate(true);
    }
    private void toolStripButtonGrowFont_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
...
        toolStripContainer1.Invalidate(true);
    }
    // We are now painting on the container, not the form!
    private void ContentPanel_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        g.DrawString(toolStripTextBoxMessage.Text,
            new Font("Times New Roman", currFontSize),
            Brushes.Black, 10, 60);
    }
}
```

Of course, the `ToolStripContainer` can be configured in various ways to tweak how it operates. I leave it to you to check out the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for complete details. Figure 19-25 shows the completed project.

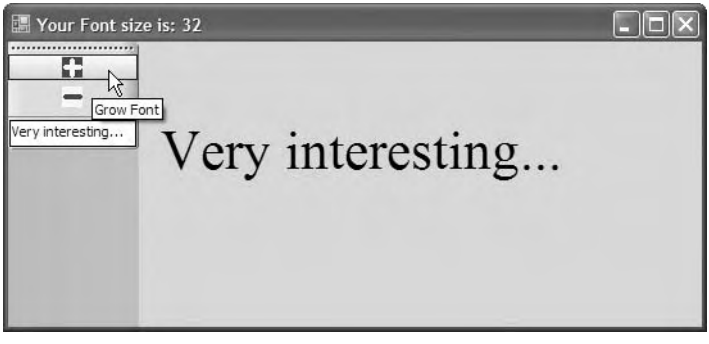


Figure 19-25. *ToolStripApp, now with a dockable* `ToolStrip`

■ **Source Code** The ToolStripApp project is included under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

Building an MDI Application

To wrap up our initial look at Windows Forms, I'll close this chapter by discussing how to configure a Form to function as a parent to any number of child windows (i.e., an MDI container). MDI applications allow users to have multiple child windows open at the same time within the same topmost window. In the world of MDIs, each window represents a given "document" of the application. For example, Visual Studio 2005 is an MDI application in that you are able to have multiple documents open from within an instance of the application.

When you are building MDI applications using Windows Forms, your first task is to (of course) create a brand-new Windows application. The initial Form of the application typically hosts a menu system that allows you to create new documents (such as File ➤ New) as well as arrange existing open windows (cascade, vertical tile, and horizontal tile).

Creating the child windows is interesting, as you typically define a prototypical Form that functions as a basis for each child window. Given that Forms are class types, any private data defined in the child Form will be unique to a particular instance. For example, if you were to create an MDI word processing application, you might create a child Form that maintains a `StringBuilder` to represent the text. If a user created five new child windows, each Form would maintain its own `StringBuilder` instance, which could be individually manipulated.

Additionally, MDI applications allow you to "merge menus." As mentioned previously, parent windows typically have a menu system that allows the user to spawn and organize additional child windows. However, what if the child window also maintains a menuing system? If the user maximizes a particular child window, you need to merge the child's menu system within the parent Form to allow the user to activate items from each menu system. The Windows Forms namespace defines a number of properties, methods, and events that allow you to programmatically merge menu systems. In addition, there is a "default merge" system, which works in a good number of cases.

Building the Parent Form

To illustrate the basics of building an MDI application, begin by creating a brand-new Windows application named SimpleMdiApp. Almost all of the MDI infrastructure can be assigned to your initial Form using various design-time tools. To begin, locate the `IsMdiContainer` property in the Properties window and set it to true. If you look at the design-time Form, you'll see that the client area has been modified to visually represent a container of child windows.

Next, place a new `MenuStrip` control on your main Form. This menu specifies three topmost items named File, Window, and Arrange Windows. The File menu contains two subitems named New and Exit. The Window menu does not contain any subitems, because you will programmatically add new items as the user creates additional child windows. Finally, the Arrange Window menu defines three subitems named Cascade, Vertical, and Horizontal.

Once you have created the menu UI, handle the `Click` event for the Exit, New, Cascade, Vertical, and Horizontal menu items (remember, the Window menu does not have any subitems just yet). You'll implement the File ➤ New handler in the next section, but for now here is the code behind the remaining menu selections:

```
// Handle File | Exit event and arrange all child windows.
private void cascadeToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    LayoutMdi(MdiLayout.Cascade);
}
private void verticalToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    LayoutMdi(MdiLayout.TileVertical);
}
private void horizontalToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
```

```
{
    LayoutMdi(MdiLayout.TileHorizontal);
}
private void exitToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    Application.Exit();
}
```

The main point of interest here is the use of the `LayoutMdi()` method and the corresponding `MdiLayout` enumeration. The code behind each menu select handler should be quite clear. When the user selects a given arrangement, you tell the parent Form to automatically reposition any and all child windows.

Before you move on to the construction of the child Form, you need to set one additional property of the `MenuStrip`. The `MdiWindowListItem` property is used to establish which topmost menu item should be used to automatically list the name of each child window as a possible menu selection. Set this property to the `windowToolStripMenuItem` member variable. By default, this list is the value of the child's `Text` property followed by a numerical suffix (i.e., `Form1`, `Form2`, `Form3`, etc.).

Building the Child Form

Now that you have the shell of an MDI container, you need to create an additional Form that functions as the prototype for a given child window. Begin by inserting a new `Form` type into your current project (using Project ➤ Add Windows Form) named `ChildPrototypeForm` and handle the `Click` event for this Form. In the generated event handler, randomly set the background color of the client area. In addition, print out the "stringified" value of the new `Color` object into the child's caption bar. The following logic should do the trick:

```
private void ChildPrototypeForm_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Get three random numbers
    int r, g, b;
    Random ran = new Random();
    r = ran.Next(0, 255);
    g = ran.Next(0, 255);
    b = ran.Next(0, 255);

    // Now create a color for the background.
    Color currColor = Color.FromArgb(r, g, b);
    this.BackColor = currColor;
    this.Text = currColor.ToString();
}
```

Spawning Child Windows

Your final order of business is to flesh out the details behind the parent Form's File ➤ New event handler. Now that you have defined a child Form, the logic is simple: create and show a new instance of the `ChildPrototypeForm` type. As well, you need to set the value of the child Form's `MdiParent` property to point to the containing Form (in this case, your main window). Here is the update:

```
private void newToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Make a new child window.
    ChildPrototypeForm newChild = new ChildPrototypeForm();

    // Set the Parent Form of the Child window.
    newChild.MdiParent = this;
```

```
    // Display the new form.
    newChild.Show();
}
```

■ **Note** A child Form may access the `MdiParent` property directly whenever it needs to manipulate (or communicate with) its parent window.

To take this application out for a test drive, begin by creating a set of new child windows and click each one to establish a unique background color. If you examine the subitems under the Windows menu, you should see each child Form present and accounted for. As well, if you access the Arrange Window menu items, you can instruct the parent Form to vertically tile, horizontally tile, or cascade the child Forms. Figure 19-26 shows the completed application.

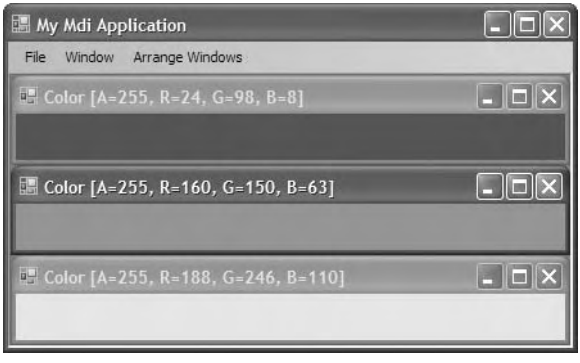


Figure 19-26. *An MDI application*

■ **Source Code** The SimpleMdiApp project can be found under the Chapter 19 subdirectory.

Summary

This chapter introduced the fine art of building a UI with the types contained in the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace. You began by building a number of applications by hand, and you learned along the way that at a minimum, a GUI application needs a class that derives from `Form` and a `Main()` method that invokes `Application.Run()`.

During the course of this chapter, you learned how to build topmost menus (and pop-up menus) and how to respond to a number of menu events. You also came to understand how to further enhance your `Form` types using toolbars and status bars. As you have seen, .NET 2.0 prefers to build such UI elements using `MenuStrips`, `ToolStrips`, and `StatusStrips` rather than the older .NET 1.*x* `MainMenu`, `ToolBar`, and `StatusBar` types (although these deprecated types are still supported). Finally, this chapter wrapped up by illustrating how to construct MDI applications using Windows Forms.

CHAPTER 20

Rendering Graphical Data with GDI+

The previous chapter introduced you to the process of building a GUI-based desktop application using `System.Windows.Forms`. The point of this chapter is to examine the details of rendering graphics (including stylized text and image data) onto a Form's surface area. We'll begin by taking a high-level look at the numerous drawing-related namespaces, and we'll examine the role of the `Paint` event,and the almighty Graphics object.

The remainder of this chapter covers how to manipulate colors, fonts, geometric shapes, and graphical images. This chapter also explores a number of rendering-centric programming techniques, such as nonrectangular hit testing, drag-and-drop logic, and the .NET resource format. While *technically* not part of GDI+ proper, resources often involve the manipulation of graphical data (which, in my opinion, is "GDI+-enough" to be presented here).

Note If you are a web programmer by trade, you may think that GDI+ is of no use to you. However, GDI+ is not limited to traditional desktop applications and is extremely relevant for web applications.

A Survey of the GDI+ Namespaces

The .NET platform provides a number of namespaces devoted to two-dimensional graphical rendering. In addition to the basic functionality you would expect to find in a graphics toolkit (colors, fonts, pens, brushes, etc.), you also find types that enable geometric transformations, antialiasing, palette blending, and document printing support. Collectively speaking, these namespaces make up the .NET facility we call *GDI+*, which is a managed alternative to the Win32 Graphical Device Interface (GDI) API. Table 20-1 gives a high-level view of the core GDI+ namespaces.

Table 20-1. *Core GDI+ Namespaces*

Namespace	Meaning in Life
`System.Drawing`	This is the core GDI+ namespace that defines numerous types for basic rendering (fonts, pens, basic brushes, etc.) as well as the almighty `Graphics` type.
`System.Drawing.Drawing2D`	This namespace provides types used for more advanced two-dimensional/vector graphics functionality (e.g., gradient brushes, pen caps, geometric transforms, etc.).
`System.Drawing.Imaging`	This namespace defines types that allow you to manipulate graphical images (e.g., change the palette, extract image metadata, manipulate metafiles, etc.).
`System.Drawing.Printing`	This namespace defines types that allow you to render images to the printed page, interact with the printer itself, and format the overall appearance of a given print job.
`System.Drawing.Text`	This namespace allows you to manipulate collections of fonts.

■ **Note** All of the GDI+ namespaces are defined within the `System.Drawing.dll` assembly. While many Visual Studio 2005 project types automatically set a reference to this code library, you can manually reference `System.Drawing.dll` using the Add References dialog box if necessary.

An Overview of the System.Drawing Namespace

The vast majority of the types you'll use when programming GDI+ applications are found within the `System.Drawing` namespace. As you would expect, there are classes that represent images, brushes, pens, and fonts. Furthermore, `System.Drawing` defines a number of related utility types such as `Color`, `Point`, and `Rectangle`. Table 20-2 lists some (but not all) of the core types.

Table 20-2. *Core Types of the* `System.Drawing` *Namespace*

Type	Meaning in Life
`Bitmap`	This type encapsulates image data (`*.bmp` or otherwise).

`Brush`
`Brushes`
`SolidBrush`
`SystemBrushes`
`TextureBrush`
	`Brush` objects are used to fill the interiors of graphical shapes such as rectangles, ellipses, and polygons.

`BufferedGraphics`	This new .NET 2.0 type provides a graphics buffer for double buffering, which is used to reduce or eliminate flicker caused by redrawing a display surface.
`Color` `SystemColors`	The `Color` and `SystemColors` types define a number of static read-only properties used to obtain specific colors for the construction of various pens/brushes.
`Font` `FontFamily`	The `Font` type encapsulates the characteristics of a given font (i.e., type name, bold, italic, point size, etc.). `FontFamily` provides an abstraction for a group of fonts having a similar design but with certain variations in style.
`Graphics`	This core class represents a valid drawing surface, as well as a number of methods to render text, images, and geometric patterns.

Type	Meaning in Life
`Icon` `SystemIcons`	These classes represent custom icons, as well as the set of standard system-supplied icons.
`Image` `ImageAnimator`	`Image` is an abstract base class that provides functionality for the `Bitmap`, `Icon`, and `Cursor` types. `ImageAnimator` provides a way to iterate over a number of `Image`-derived types at some specified interval.

`Pen`
`Pens`
`SystemPens`
	`Pens` are objects used to draw lines and curves. The `Pens` type defines a number of static properties that return a new `Pen` of a given color.

`Point` `PointF`	These structures represent an (*x*, *y*) coordinate mapping to an underlying integer or float, respectively.
`Rectangle` `RectangleF`	These structures represent a rectangular dimension (again mapping to an underlying integer or float).
`Size` `SizeF`	These structures represent a given height/width (again mapping to an underlying integer or float).
`StringFormat`	This type is used to encapsulate various features of textual layout (i.e., alignment, line spacing, etc.).
`Region`	This type describes the interior of a geometric image composed of rectangles and paths.

The System.Drawing Utility Types

Many of the drawing methods defined by the `System.Drawing.Graphics` object require you to specify the position or area in which you wish to render a given item. For example, the `DrawString()` method requires you to specify the location to render the text string on the `Control`-derived type. Given that `DrawString()` has been overloaded a number of times, this positional parameter may be specified using an (*x*, *y*) coordinate or the dimensions of a "box" to draw within. Other GDI+ type methods may require you to specify the width and height of a given item, or the internal bounds of a geometric image.

To specify such information, the `System.Drawing` namespace defines the `Point`, `Rectangle`, `Region`, and `Size` types. Obviously, a `Point` represents an (*x*, *y*) coordinate. `Rectangle` types capture a pair of points representing the upper-left and bottom-right bounds of a rectangular region. `Size` types are similar to `Rectangles`, but this structure represent a particular dimension using a given length and width. Finally, `Regions` provide a way to represent and qualify nonrectangular surfaces.

The member variables used by the `Point`, `Rectangle`, and `Size` types are internally represented as an integer data type. If you need a finer level of granularity, you are free to make use of the corresponding `PointF`, `RectangleF`, and `SizeF` types, which (as you might guess) map to an underlying float. Regardless of the underlying data representation, each type has an identical set of members, including a number of overloaded operators.

The Point(F) Type

The first utility type you should be aware of is `System.Drawing.Point(F)`. Unlike the illustrative `Point` types created in previous chapters, the GDI+ `Point(F)` type supports a number of helpful members, including

- `+`, `-`, `==`, `!=`: The `Point` type overloads various C# operators.
- `X`, `Y`: These members provide access to the underlying (*x*, *y*) values of the `Point`.
- `IsEmpty`: This member returns true if *x* and *y* are both set to 0.

To illustrate working with the GDI+ utility types, here is a console application (named UtilTypes) that makes use of the `System.Drawing.Point` type (be sure to set a reference to `System.Drawing.dll`).

```
using System;
using System.Drawing;

namespace UtilTypes
{
     public class Program
     {
          static void Main(string[] args)
          {
               // Create and offset a point.
               Point pt = new Point(100, 72);
               Console.WriteLine(pt);
               pt.Offset(20, 20);
               Console.WriteLine(pt);

               // Overloaded Point operators.
               Point pt2 = pt;
               if(pt == pt2)
                    WriteLine("Points are the same");
               else
                    WriteLine("Different points");

               // Change pt2's X value.
               pt2.X = 4000;

               // Now show each X value:
               Console.WriteLine("First point: {0} ", pt);
               Console.WriteLine("Second point: {0} ", pt2);
               Console.ReadLine();
          }
     }
}
```

The Rectangle(F) Type

`Rectangle`s, like `Point`s, are useful in many applications (GUI-based or otherwise). One of the more useful methods of the `Rectangle` type is `Contains()`. This method allows you to determine if a given `Point` or `Rectangle` is within the current bounds of another object. Later in this chapter, you'll see how to make use of this method to perform hit testing of GDI+ images. Until then, here is a simple example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
     ...
     // Point is initially outside of rectangle's bounds.
     Rectangle r1 = new Rectangle(0, 0, 100, 100);
     Point pt3 = new Point(101, 101);
     if(r1.Contains(pt3))
          Console.WriteLine("Point is within the rect!");
     else
          Console.WriteLine("Point is not within the rect!");

     // Now place point in rectangle's area.
     pt3.X = 50;
     pt3.Y = 30;
```

```
    if(r1.Contains(pt3))
        Console.WriteLine("Point is within the rect!");
    else
        Console.WriteLine("Point is not within the rect!");
    Console.ReadLine();
}
```

The Region Class

The `Region` type represents the interior of a geometric shape. Given this last statement, it should make sense that the constructors of the `Region` class require you to send an instance of some existing geometric pattern. For example, assume you have created a 100×100 pixel rectangle. If you wish to gain access to the rectangle's interior region, you could write the following:

```
// Get the interior of this rectangle.
Rectangle r = new Rectangle(0, 0, 100, 100);
Region rgn = new Region(r);
```

Once you have the interior dimensions of a given shape, you may manipulate it using various members such as the following:

- `Complement()`: Updates this `Region` to the portion of the specified graphics object that does not intersect with this `Region`
- `Exclude()`: Updates this `Region` to the portion of its interior that does not intersect with the specified graphics object
- `GetBounds()`: Returns a `Rectangle(F)` that represents a rectangular region that bounds this `Region`
- `Intersect()`: Updates this `Region` to the intersection of itself with the specified graphics object
- `Transform()`: Transforms a `Region` by the specified `Matrix` object
- `Union()`: Updates this `Region` to the union of itself and the specified graphics object
- `Translate()`: Offsets the coordinates of this `Region` by a specified amount

I'm sure you get the general idea behind these coordinate primitives; please consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation if you require further details.

■ **Note** The `Size` and `SizeF` types require little comment. These types each define `Height` and `Width` properties and a handful of overloaded operators.

■ **Source Code** The UtilTypes project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Understanding the Graphics Class

The `System.Drawing.Graphics` class is the gateway to GDI+ rendering functionality. This class not only represents the surface you wish to draw upon (such as a Form's surface, a control's surface, or region of memory), but also defines dozens of members that allow you to render text, images (icons, bitmaps, etc.), and numerous geometric patterns. Table 20-3 gives a partial list of members.

Table 20-3. *Members of the* `Graphics` *Class*

Methods	Meaning in Life

`FromHdc()`
`FromHwnd()`
`FromImage()`
	These static methods provide a way to obtain a valid `Graphics` object from a given image (e.g., icon, bitmap, etc.) or GUI widget.

`Clear()`	Fills a `Graphics` object with a specified color, erasing the current drawing surface in the process.

`DrawArc()`
`DrawBezier()`
`DrawBeziers()`
`DrawCurve()`
`DrawEllipse()`
`DrawIcon()`
`DrawLine()`
`DrawLines()`
`DrawPie()`
`DrawPath()`
`DrawRectangle()`
`DrawRectangles()`
`DrawString()`
	These methods are used to render a given image or geometric pattern. As you will see, `DrawXXX()` methods require the use of GDI+ `Pen` objects.

`FillEllipse()`
`FillPath()`
`FillPie()`
`FillPolygon()`
`FillRectangle()`
	These methods are used to fill the interior of a given geometric shape. As you will see, `FillXXX()` methods require the use of GDI+ `Brush` objects.

As well as providing a number of rendering methods, the `Graphics` class defines additional members that allow you to configure the "state" of the `Graphics` object. By assigning values to the properties shown in Table 20-4, you are able to alter the current rendering operation.

Table 20-4. *Stateful Properties of the* `Graphics` *Class*

Properties	Meaning in Life

`Clip`
`ClipBounds`
`VisibleClipBounds`
`IsClipEmpty`
`IsVisibleClipEmpty`
	These properties allow you to set the clipping options used with the current `Graphics` object.

`Transform`	This property allows you to transform "world coordinates" (more details on this later).

`PageUnit`
`PageScale`
`DpiX`
`DpiY`
	These properties allow you to configure the point of origin for your rendering operations, as well as the unit of measurement.

`SmoothingMode`
`PixelOffsetMode`
`TextRenderingHint`
	These properties allow you to configure the smoothness of geometric objects and text.

`CompositingMode` `CompositingQuality`	The `CompositingMode` property determines whether drawing overwrites the background or is blended with the background.
`InterpolationMode`	This property specifies how data is interpolated between endpoints.

■ **Note** As of .NET 2.0, the `System.Drawing` namespace provides a `BufferedGraphics` type that allows you to render graphics using a double-buffering system to minimize or eliminate the flickering that can occur during a rendering operation. Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details.

Now, despite what you may be thinking, the `Graphics` class is not directly creatable via the `new` keyword, as there are no publicly defined constructors. How, then, do you obtain a valid `Graphics` object? Glad you asked.

Understanding Paint Sessions

The most common way to obtain a `Graphics` object is to interact with the `Paint` event. Recall from the previous chapter that the `Control` class defines a virtual method named `OnPaint()`. When you want a Form to render graphical data to its surface, you may override this method and extract a `Graphics` object from the incoming `PaintEventArgs` parameter. To illustrate, create a new Windows Forms application named BasicPaintForm, and update the `Form`-derived class as so:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     public MainForm()
     {
          InitializeComponent();
          CenterToScreen();
          this.Text = "Basic Paint Form";
     }

     protected override void OnPaint(PaintEventArgs e)
     {
          // If overriding OnPaint(), be sure to call base class implementation.
          base.OnPaint(e);

          // Obtain a Graphics object from the incoming
          // PaintEventArgs.
          Graphics g = e.Graphics;

          // Render a textual message in a given font and color.
          g.DrawString("Hello GDI+", new Font("Times New Roman", 20),
                               Brushes.Green, 0, 0);
     }
}
```

While overriding `OnPaint()` is permissible, it is more common to handle the `Paint` event using the associated `PaintEventHandler` delegate (in fact, this is the default behavior taken by Visual Studio 2005 when handling events with the Properties window). This delegate can point to any method taking a `System.Object` as the first parameter and a `PaintEventArgs` as the second. Assuming you have handled the `Paint` event (via the Visual Studio 2005 designers or manually in code), you are once again able to extract a `Graphics` object from the incoming `PaintEventArgs`. Here is the update:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     public MainForm()
     {
          InitializeComponent();
          CenterToScreen();
```

```
        this.Text = "Basic Paint Form";

        // Visual Studio 2005 places this
        // code within InitializeComponent().
        this.Paint += new PaintEventHandler(MainForm_Paint);
    }

    private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        g.DrawString("Hello GDI+", new Font("Times New Roman", 20),
            Brushes.Green, 0, 0);
    }
}
```

Regardless of how you respond to the `Paint` event, be aware that whenever a window becomes "dirty," the `Paint` event will fire. As you may be aware, a window is considered "dirty" whenever it is resized, uncovered by another window (partially or completely), or minimized and then restored. In all these cases, the .NET platform ensures that when your Form needs to be redrawn, the `Paint` event handler (or overridden `OnPaint()` method) is called automatically.

Invalidating the Form's Client Area

During the flow of a GDI+ application, you may need to explicitly fire the `Paint` event, rather than waiting for the window to become "naturally dirty." For example, you may be building a program that allows the user to select from a number of bitmap images using a custom dialog box. Once the dialog box is dismissed, you need to draw the newly selected image onto the Form's client area. Obviously, if you waited for the window to become "naturally dirty," the user would not see the change take place until the window was resized or uncovered by another window. To force a window to repaint itself programmatically, simply call the inherited `Invalidate()` method:

```
public partial class MainForm: Form
{
...
    private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        // Render a bitmap here.
    }

    private void GetNewBitmap()
    {
        // Show dialog box and get new image.
        // Repaint the entire client area.
        Invalidate();
    }
}
```

The `Invalidate()` method has been overloaded a number of times to allow you to specify a specific rectangular region to repaint, rather than repainting the entire client area (which is the default). If you wish to only update the extreme upper-left rectangle of the client area, you could write the following:

```
// Repaint a given rectangular area of the Form.
private void UpdateUpperArea()
{
```

```
    Rectangle myRect = new Rectangle(0, 0, 75, 150);
    Invalidate(myRect);
}
```

Obtaining a Graphics Object Outside of a Paint Event Handler

In some rare cases, you may need to access a `Graphics` object *outside* the scope of a `Paint` event handler. For example, assume you wish to draw a small circle at the (*x*, *y*) position where the mouse has been clicked. To obtain a valid `Graphics` object from within the scope of a `MouseDown` event handler, one approach is to call the static `Graphics.FromHwnd()` method. Based on your background in Win32 development, you may know that an `HWND` is a data structure that represents a given Win32 window. Under the .NET platform, the inherited `Handle` property extracts the underlying `HWND`, which can be used as a parameter to `Graphics.FromHwnd()`:

```
private void MainForm_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
{
    // Grab a Graphics object via Hwnd.
    Graphics g = Graphics.FromHwnd(this.Handle);

    // Now draw a 10*10 circle at mouse click.
    g.FillEllipse(Brushes.Firebrick, e.X, e.Y, 10, 10);

    // Dispose of all Graphics objects you create directly.
    g.Dispose();
}
```

While this logic renders a circle outside an `OnPaint()` event handler, it is very important to understand that when the form is invalidated (and thus redrawn), each of the circles is erased! This should make sense, given that this rendering happens only within the context of a `MouseDown` event. A far better approach is to have the `MouseDown` event handler create a new `Point` type, which is then added to an internal collection (such as a `List<T>`), followed by a call to `Invalidate()`. At this point, the `Paint` event handler can simply iterate over the collection and draw each `Point`:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    // Used to hold all the points.
    private List<Point> myPts = new List<Point>();

    public MainForm()
    {
...
        this.MouseDown += new MouseEventHandler(MainForm_MouseDown);
    }

    private void MainForm_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
    {
        // Add to points collection.
        myPts.Add(new Point(e.X, e.Y));
        Invalidate();
    }

    private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        g.DrawString("Hello GDI+", new Font("Times New Roman", 20),
                     new SolidBrush(Color.Black), 0, 0);
      foreach(Point p in myPts)
```

```
            g.FillEllipse(Brushes.Firebrick, p.X, p.Y, 10, 10);
        }
}
```

Using this approach, the rendered circles are always present and accounted for, as the graphical rendering has been handled within the `Paint` event. Figure 20-1 shows a test run of this initial GDI+ application.

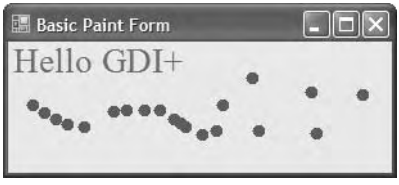


Figure 20-1. *A simple painting application*

■ **Source Code** The BasicPaintForm project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Regarding the Disposal of a Graphics Object

If you were reading closely over the last several pages, you may have noticed that *some* of the sample code directly called the `Dispose()` method of the `Graphics` object, while other sample code did not. Given that a `Graphics` type is manipulating various underlying unmanaged resources, it should make sense that it would be advantageous to release said resources via `Dispose()` as soon as possible (rather than via the garbage collector in the finalization process). The same can be said for any type that supports the `IDisposable` interface. When working with GDI+ `Graphics` objects, remember the following rules of thumb:

- If you directly create a `Graphics` object, dispose of it when you are finished.
- If you reference an existing `Graphics` object, do *not* dispose of it.

To clarify, consider the following `Paint` event handler:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    // Load a local *.jpg file.
    Image myImageFile = Image.FromFile("landscape.jpg");

    // Create new Graphics object based on the image.
    Graphics imgGraphics = Graphics.FromImage(myImageFile);

    // Render new data onto the image.
    imgGraphics.FillEllipse(Brushes.DarkOrange, 50, 50, 150, 150);

    // Draw image to Form.
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    g.DrawImage(myImageFile, new PointF(0.0F, 0.0F));

    // Release Graphics object we created.
    imgGraphics.Dispose();
}
```

Now at this point in the chapter, don't become concerned if some of this GDI+ logic looks a bit foreign. However, notice that you are obtaining a `Graphics` object from a `*.jpg` file loaded from the local application directory (via the static `Graphics.FromImage()` method). Because you have explicitly created this `Graphics` object, best practice states that you should `Dispose()` of the object when you have finished making use of it, to free up the internal resources for use by other parts of the system.

However, notice that you did not explicitly call `Dispose()` on the `Graphics` object you obtained from the incoming `PaintEventArgs`. This is due to the fact that you did not directly create the object and cannot ensure other parts of the program are making use of it. Clearly, it would be a problem if you released a `Graphics` object used elsewhere!

On a related note, recall from our examination of the .NET garbage collector in Chapter 5 that if you do forget to call `Dispose()` on a method implementing `IDisposable`, the internal resources will eventually be freed when the object is garbage-collected at a later time. In this light, the manual disposal of the `imgGraphics` object is not technically necessary. Although explicitly disposing of GDI+ objects you directly created is smart programming, in order to keep the code examples in this chapter crisp, I will not manually dispose of each GDI+ type.

The GDI+ Coordinate Systems

Our next task is to examine the underlying coordinate system. GDI+ defines three distinct coordinate systems, which are used by the runtime to determine the location and size of the content to be rendered. First we have what are known as *world coordinates*. World coordinates represent an abstraction of the size of a given GDI+ type, irrespective of the unit of measurement. For example, if you draw a rectangle using the dimensions (0, 0, 100, 100), you have specified a rectangle 100×100 "things" in size. As you may guess, the default "thing" is a pixel; however, it can be configured to be another unit of measure (inch, centimeter, etc.).

Next, we have *page coordinates*. Page coordinates represent an offset applied to the original world coordinates. This is helpful in that you are not the one in charge of manually applying offsets in your code (should you need them). For example, if you have a Form that needs to maintain a 100×100 pixel border, you can specify a (100*100) page coordinate to allow all rending to begin at point (100*100). In your code base, however, you are able to specify simple world coordinates (thereby avoiding the need to manually calculate the offset).

Finally, we have *device coordinates*. Device coordinates represent the result of applying page coordinates to the original world coordinates. This coordinate system is used to determine exactly where the GDI+ type will be rendered. When you are programming with GDI+, you will typically think in terms of world coordinates, which are the baseline used to determine the size and location of a GDI+ type. To render in world coordinates requires no special coding actions—simply pass in the dimensions for the current rendering operation:

```
void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    // Render a rectangle in world coordinates.
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    g.DrawRectangle(Pens.Black, 10, 10, 100, 100);
}
```

Under the hood, your world coordinates are automatically mapped in terms of page coordinates, which are then mapped into device coordinates. In many cases, you will never directly make use of page or device coordinates unless you wish to apply some sort of graphical transformation. Given that the previous code did not specify any transformational logic, the world, page, and device coordinates are identical.

If you do wish to apply various transformations before rendering your GDI+ logic, you will make use of various members of the `Graphics` type (such as the `TranslateTransform()` method) to

specify various "page coordinates" to your existing world coordinate system before the rendering operation. The result is the set of device coordinates that will be used to render the GDI+ type to the target device:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     // Specify page coordinate offsets (10 * 10).
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     g.TranslateTransform(10, 10);
     g.DrawRectangle(10, 10, 100, 100);
}
```

In this case, the rectangle is actually rendered with a top-left point of (20, 20), given that the world coordinates have been offset by the call to `TranslateTransform()`.

The Default Unit of Measure

Under GDI+, the default unit of measure is pixel-based. The origin begins in the upper-left corner with the *x*-axis increasing to the right and the *y*-axis increasing downward (see Figure 20-2).

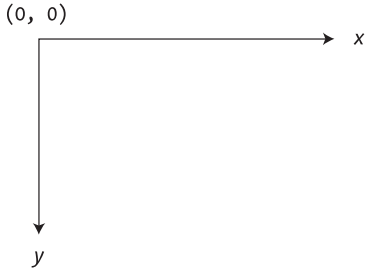
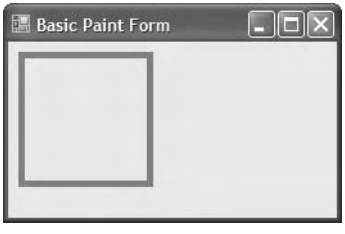


Figure 20-2. *The default coordinate system of GDI+*

Thus, if you render a `Rectangle` using a 5-pixel thick red pen as follows:

```
void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     // Set up world coordinates using the default unit of measure.
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     g.DrawRectangle(new Pen(Color.Red, 5), 10, 10, 100, 100);
}
```

you would see a square rendered 10 pixels down and in from the top-left client edge of the Form, as shown in Figure 20-3.



Specifying an Alternative Unit of Measure

If you do not wish to render images using a pixel-based unit of measure, you are able to change this default setting by setting the `PageUnit` property of the `Graphics` object to alter the units used by the page coordinate system. The `PageUnit` property can be assigned any member of the `GraphicsUnit` enumeration:

```
public enum GraphicsUnit
{
    // Specifies world coordinates.
    World,
    // Pixels for video displays and 1/100 inch for printers.
    Display,
    // Specifies a pixel.
    Pixel,
    // Specifies a printer's point (1/72 inch).
    Point,
    // Specifies an inch.
    Inch,
    // Specifies a document unit (1/300 inch).
    Document,
    // Specifies a millimeter.
    Millimeter
}
```

To illustrate how to change the underlying `GraphicsUnit`, update the previous rendering code as follows:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     // Draw a rectangle in inches...not pixels.
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     g.PageUnit = GraphicsUnit.Inch;
     g.DrawRectangle(new Pen(Color.Red, 5), 0, 0, 100, 100);
}
```

You would find a *radically* different rectangle, as shown in Figure 20-4.

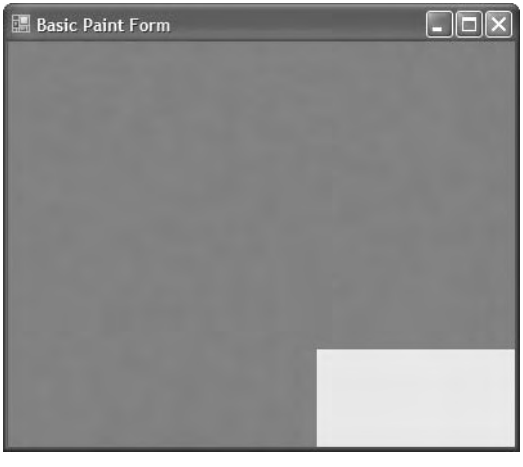


Figure 20-4. *Rendering using inch units*

The reason that 95 percent (or so) of the Form's client area is now filled with red is because you have configured a `Pen` with a 5-*inch* nib! The rectangle itself is 100×100 *inches* in size. In fact, the small gray box you see located in the lower-right corner is the upper-left interior of the rectangle.

Specifying an Alternative Point of Origin

Recall that when you make use of the default coordinate and measurement system, point (0, 0) is at the extreme upper left of the surface area. While this is often what you desire, what if you wish to alter the location where rendering begins? For example, let's assume that your application always needs to reserve a 100-pixel boundary around the Form's client area (for whatever reason). You need to ensure that all GDI+ operations take place somewhere within this internal region.

One approach you could take is to offset all your rendering code manually. This, of course, would be bothersome, as you would need to constantly apply some offset value to each and every rendering operation. It would be far better (and simpler) if you could set a property that says in effect, "Although *I* might say render a rectangle with a point of origin at (0, 0), make sure *you* begin at point (100, 100)." This would simplify your life a great deal, as you could continue to specify your plotting points without modification.

In GDI+, you can adjust the point of origin by setting the transformation value using the `TranslateTransform()` method of the `Graphics` class, which allows you to specify a page coordinate system that will be applied to your original world coordinate specifications, for example:

```
void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     // Set page coordinate to (100, 100).
     g.TranslateTransform(100, 100);

     // World origin is still (0, 0, 100, 100),
     // however, device origin is now (100, 100, 200, 200).
     g.DrawRectangle(new Pen(Color.Red, 5), 0, 0, 100, 100);
}
```

Here, you have set the world coordinate values (0, 0, 100, 100). However, the page coordinate values have specified an offset of (100, 100). Given this, the device coordinates map to (100, 100, 200, 200). Thus, although the call to `DrawRectangle()` looks as if you are rendering a rectangle on the upper left of the Form, the rendering shown in Figure 20-5 has taken place.

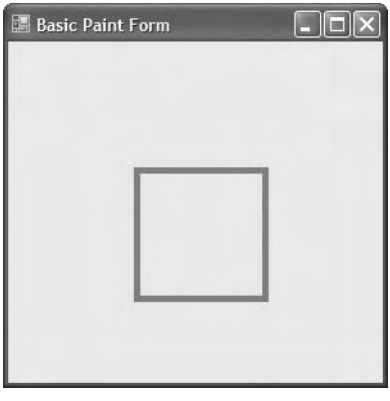


Figure 20-5. *The result of applying page offsets*

To help you experiment with some of the ways to alter the GDI+ coordinate system, this book's downloadable source code (visit the Downloads section of the Apress website at `www.apress.com`) provides a sample application named CoorSystem. Using two menu items, you are able to alter the point of origin as well as the unit of measurement (see Figure 20-6).

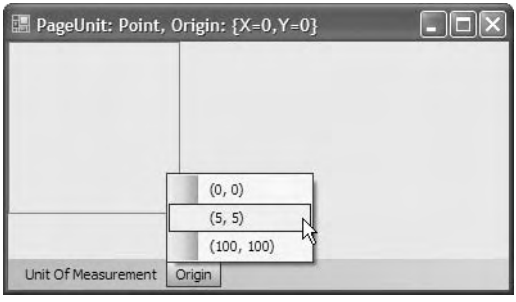


Figure 20-6. *Altering coordinate and measurement modes*

Now that you have a better understanding of the underlying transformations used to determine where to render a given GDI+ type onto a target device, the next order of business is to examine details of color manipulation.

■ **Source Code** The CoorSystem project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Defining a Color Value

Many of the rendering methods defined by the `Graphics` class require you to specify the color that should be used during the drawing process. The `System.Drawing.Color` structure represents an alpha-red-green-blue (ARGB) color constant. Most of the `Color` type's functionality comes by way of a number of static read-only properties, which return a specific `Color` type:

```
// One of many predefined colors...
Color c = Color.PapayaWhip;
```

If the default color values do not fit the bill, you are also able to create a new `Color` type and specify the `A`, `R`, `G`, and `B` values using the `FromArgb()` method:

```
// Specify ARGB manually.
Color myColor = Color.FromArgb(0, 255, 128, 64);
```

As well, using the `FromName()` method, you are able to generate a `Color` type given a string value. The characters in the string parameter must match one of the members in the `KnownColor` enumeration (which includes values for various Windows color elements such as `KnownColor.WindowFrame` and `KnownColor.WindowText`):

```
// Get Color from a known name.
Color myColor = Color.FromName("Red");
```

Regardless of the method you use, the `Color` type can be interacted with using a variety of members:

- `GetBrightness()`: Returns the brightness of the `Color` type based on hue-saturation-brightness (HSB) measurements
- `GetSaturation()`: Returns the saturation of the `Color` type based on HSB measurements
- `GetHue()`: Returns the hue of the `Color` type based on HSB measurements
- `IsSystemColor`: Determines if the `Color` type is a registered system color
- `A`, `R`, `G`, `B`: Returns the value assigned to the alpha, red, green, and blue aspects of a `Color` type

The ColorDialog Class

If you wish to provide a way for the end user of your application to configure a `Color` type, the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace provides a predefined dialog box class named `ColorDialog` (see Figure 20-7).

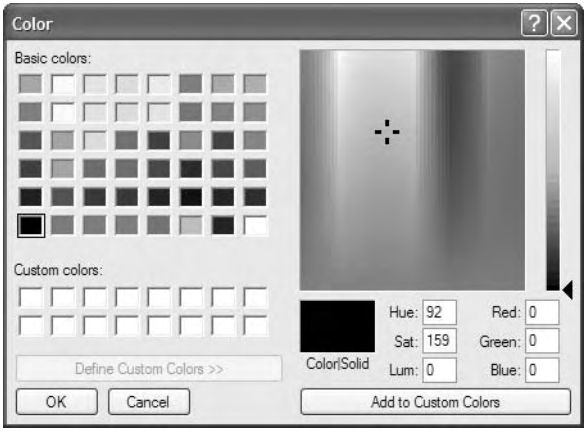


Figure 20-7. *The Windows Forms color dialog box*

Working with this dialog box is quite simple. Using a valid instance of the `ColorDialog` type, call `ShowDialog()` to display the dialog box modally. Once the user has closed the dialog box, you can extract the corresponding `Color` object using the `ColorDialog.Color` property.

Assume you wish to allow the user to configure the background color of the Form's client area using the `ColorDialog`. To keep things simple, you will display the `ColorDialog` when the user clicks anywhere on the client area:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    private ColorDialog colorDlg;
    private Color currColor = Color.DimGray;

    public MainForm()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
        colorDlg = new ColorDialog();
        Text = "Click on me to change the color";
        this.MouseDown += new MouseEventHandler(MainForm_MouseDown);
    }
```

```
    private void MainForm_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
    {
        if (colorDlg.ShowDialog() != DialogResult.Cancel)
        {
            currColor = colorDlg.Color;
            this.BackColor = currColor;
            string strARGB = colorDlg.Color.ToString();
            MessageBox.Show(strARGB, "Color is:");
        }
    }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The ColorDlg application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Manipulating Fonts

Next, let's examine how to programmatically manipulate fonts. The `System.Drawing.Font` type represents a given font installed on the user's machine. Font types can be defined using any number of overloaded constructors. Here are a few examples:

```
// Create a Font of a given type name and size.
Font f = new Font("Times New Roman", 12);

// Create a Font with a given name, size, and style set.
Font f2 = new Font("WingDings", 50, FontStyle.Bold | FontStyle.Underline);
```

Here, `f2` has been created by OR-ing together a set of values from the `FontStyle` enumeration:

```
public enum FontStyle
{
    Regular, Bold,
    Italic, Underline, Strikeout
}
```

Once you have configured the look and feel of your `Font` object, the next task is to pass it as a parameter to the `Graphics.DrawString()` method. Although `DrawString()` has also been overloaded a number of times, each variation typically requires the same basic information: the text to draw, the font to draw it in, a brush used for rendering, and a location in which to place it.

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;

     // Specify (String, Font, Brush, Point) as args.
     g.DrawString("My string", new Font("WingDings", 25),
          Brushes.Black, new Point(0,0));

     // Specify (String, Font, Brush, int, int)
     g .DrawString("Another string", new Font("Times New Roman", 16),
          Brushes.Red, 40, 40);
}
```

Working with Font Families

The `System.Drawing` namespace also defines the `FontFamily` type, which abstracts a group of typefaces having a similar basic design but with certain style variations. A family of fonts, such as Verdana, can include several fonts that differ in style and size. For example, Verdana 12-point bold and Verdana 24-point italic are different fonts within the Verdana font family.

The constructor of the `FontFamily` type takes a string representing the name of the font family you are attempting to capture. Once you create the "generic family," you are then able to create a more specific `Font` object:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;

     // Make a family of fonts.
     FontFamily myFamily = new FontFamily("Verdana");

     // Pass family into ctor of Font.
     Font myFont = new Font(myFamily, 12);
     g.DrawString("Hello!", myFont, Brushes.Blue, 10, 10);
}
```

Of greater interest is the ability to gather statistics regarding a given family of fonts. For example, say you are building a text-processing application and wish to determine the average width of a character in a particular `FontFamily`. What if you wish to know the ascending and descending values for a given character? To answer such questions, the `FontFamily` type defines the key members shown in Table 20-5.

Table 20-5. *Members of the* `FontFamily` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`GetCellAscent()`	Returns the ascender metric for the members in this family
`GetCellDescent()`	Returns the descender metric for members in this family
`GetLineSpacing()`	Returns the distance between two consecutive lines of text for this `FontFamily` with the specified `FontStyle`
`GetName()`	Returns the name of this `FontFamily` in the specified language
`IsStyleAvailable()`	Indicates whether the specified `FontStyle` is available

To illustrate, here is a `Paint` event handler that prints a number of characteristics of the Verdana font family:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     FontFamily myFamily = new FontFamily("Verdana");
     Font myFont = new Font(myFamily, 12);
     int y = 0;
     int fontHeight = myFont.Height;

     // Show units of measurement for FontFamily members.
     this.Text = "Measurements are in GraphicsUnit." + myFont.Unit;
     g.DrawString("The Verdana family.", myFont, Brushes.Blue, 10, y);
     y += 20;
```

```
    // Print our family ties...
    g.DrawString("Ascent for bold Verdana: " +
                 myFamily.GetCellAscent(FontStyle.Bold),
                 myFont, Brushes.Black, 10, y + fontHeight);
    y += 20;
    g.DrawString("Descent for bold Verdana: " +
                 myFamily.GetCellDescent(FontStyle.Bold),
                 myFont, Brushes.Black, 10, y + fontHeight);
    y += 20;
    g.DrawString("Line spacing for bold Verdana: " +
                 myFamily.GetLineSpacing(FontStyle.Bold),
                 myFont, Brushes.Black, 10, y + fontHeight);
    y += 20;
    g.DrawString("Height for bold Verdana: " +
                 myFamily.GetEmHeight(FontStyle.Bold),
                 myFont, Brushes.Black, 10, y + fontHeight);
    y += 20;
}
```

Figure 20-8 shows the result.

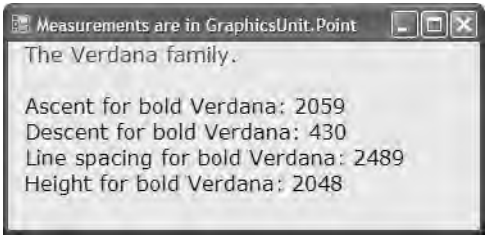

Measurements are in GraphicsUnit.Point
The Verdana family.
Ascent for bold Verdana: 2059
Descent for bold Verdana: 430
Line spacing for bold Verdana: 2489
Height for bold Verdana: 2048

Figure 20-8. *Gathering statistics of the Verdana font family*

Note that these members of the `FontFamily` type return values using `GraphicsUnit.Point` (not `Pixel`) as the unit of measure, which corresponds to 1/72 inch. You are free to transform these values to other units of measure as you see fit.

■ **Source Code** The FontFamilyApp application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Working with Font Faces and Font Sizes

Next, you'll build a more complex application that allows the user to manipulate a `Font` object maintained by a Form. The application will allow the user to select the current font face from a predefined set using the Configure ➤ Font Face menu selection. You'll also allow the user to indirectly control the size of the `Font` object using a Windows Forms `Timer` object. If the user activates the `Timer` using the Configure ➤ Swell? menu item, the size of the `Font` object increases at a regular interval (to a maximum upper limit). In this way, the text appears to swell and thus provides an animation of "breathing" text. Finally, you'll use a final menu item under the Configure menu named List All Fonts, which will be used to list all fonts installed on the end user's machine. Figure 20-9 shows the menu UI logic.

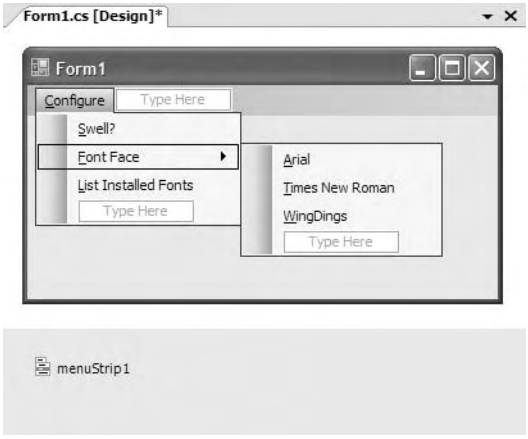


Figure 20-9. *Menu layout of the FontApp project*

To begin implementing the application, update the Form with a `Timer` member variable (named `swellTimer`), a string (`strFontFace`) to represent the current font face, and an integer (`swellValue`) to represent the amount to adjust the font size. Within the Form's constructor, configure the `Timer` to emit a `Tick` event every 100 milliseconds:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     private Timer swellTimer = new Timer();
     private int swellValue;
     private string strFontFace  = "WingDings";

     public MainForm()
     {
          InitializeComponent();
          BackColor = Color.Honeydew;
          CenterToScreen();

          // Configure the Timer.
          swellTimer.Enabled = true;
          swellTimer.Interval = 100;
          swellTimer.Tick += new EventHandler(swellTimer_Tick);
     }
}
```

In the `Tick` event handler, increase the value of the `swellValue` data member by 5. Recall that the `swellValue` integer will be added to the current font size to provide a simple animation (assume `swellValue` has a maximum upper limit of 50). To help reduce the flicker that can occur when redrawing the entire client area, notice how the call to `Invalidate()` is only refreshing the upper rectangular area of the Form:

```
private void swellTimer_Tick(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Increase current swellValue by 5.
     swellValue += 5;
     // If this value is greater than or equal to 50, reset to zero.
     if(swellValue >= 50)
          swellValue = 0;
```

```
    // Just invalidate the minimal dirty rectangle to help reduce flicker.
    Invalidate(new Rectangle(0, 0, ClientRectangle.Width, 100));
}
```

Now that the upper 100 pixels of your client area are refreshed with each tick of the `Timer`, you had better have something to render! In the Form's `Paint` handler, create a `Font` object based on the user-defined font face (as selected from the appropriate menu item) and current `swellValue` (as dictated by the `Timer`). Once you have your `Font` object fully configured, render a message into the center of the dirty rectangle:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    // Our font size can be between 12 and 62,
    // based on the current swellValue.
    Font theFont = new Font(strFontFace, 12 + swellValue);
    string message = "Hello GDI+";

    // Display message in the center of the rect.
    float windowCenter = this.DisplayRectangle.Width/2;
    SizeF stringSize = g.MeasureString(message, theFont);
    float startPos = windowCenter - (stringSize.Width/2);
    g.DrawString(message, theFont, new SolidBrush(Color.Blue), startPos, 10);
}
```

As you would guess, if a user selects a specific font face, the `Clicked` handler for each menu selection is in charge of updating the `fontFace` string variable and invalidating the client area, for example:

```
private void arialToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    strFontFace = "Arial";
    Invalidate();
}
```

The `Click` menu handler for the Swell menu item will be used to allow the user to stop or start the swelling of the text (i.e., enable or disable the animation). To do so, toggle the `Enabled` property of the `Timer` as follows:

```
private void swellToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    swellTimer.Enabled = !swellTimer.Enabled;
}
```

Enumerating Installed Fonts

Next, let's expand this program to display the set of installed fonts on the target machine using types within `System.Drawing.Text`. This namespace contains a handful of types that can be used to discover and manipulate the set of fonts installed on the target machine. For our purposes, we are only concerned with the `InstalledFontCollection` class.

When the user selects the Configure ➤ List Installed Fonts menu item, the corresponding `Clicked` handler creates an instance of the `InstalledFontCollection` class. This class maintains an array named `FontFamily`, which represents the set of all fonts on the target machine and may be obtained using the `InstalledFontCollection.Families` property. Using the `FontFamily.Name` property, you are able to extract the font face (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, etc.) for each font.

Add a private string data member to your Form named `installedFonts` to hold each font face. The logic in the List Installed Fonts menu handler creates an instance of the `InstalledFontCollection` type, reads the name of each string, and adds the new font face to the private `installedFonts` data member:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     // Holds the list of fonts.
     private string installedFonts;

     // Menu handler to get the list of installed fonts.
     private void mnuConfigShowFonts_Clicked(object sender, EventArgs e)
     {
          InstalledFontCollection fonts = new InstalledFontCollection();
          for(int i = 0; i < fonts.Families.Length; i++)
               installedFonts += fonts.Families[i].Name + "  ";

          // This time, we need to invalidate the entire client area,
          // as we will paint the installedFonts string on the lower half
          // of the client rectangle.
          Invalidate();
     }
...
}
```

The final task is to render the `installedFonts` string to the client area, directly below the screen real estate that is used for your swelling text:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     Font theFont = new Font(strFontFace, 12 + swellValue);
     string message = "Hello GDI+";

     // Display message in the center of the window!
     float windowCenter = this.DisplayRectangle.Width/2;
     SizeF stringSize = e.Graphics.MeasureString(message, theFont);
     float startPos = windowCenter - (stringSize.Width/2);
     g.DrawString(message, theFont, Brushes.Blue, startPos, 10);

     // Show installed fonts in the rectangle below the swell area.
     Rectangle myRect = new Rectangle(0, 100,
          ClientRectangle.Width, ClientRectangle.Height);

     // Paint this area of the Form black.
     g.FillRectangle(new SolidBrush(Color.Black), myRect);
     g.DrawString(installedFonts, new Font("Arial", 12),
          Brushes.White, myRect);
}
```

Recall that the size of the "dirty rectangle" has been mapped to the upper 100 pixels of the client rectangle. Because your `Tick` handler invalidates only a portion of the Form, the remaining area is not redrawn when the `Tick` event has been sent (to help optimize the rendering of the client area).

As a final touch to ensure proper redrawing, let's handle the Form's `Resize` event to ensure that if the user resizes the Form, the lower part of client rectangle is redrawn correctly:

```
private void MainForm_Resize(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
     Rectangle myRect = new Rectangle(0, 100,
          ClientRectangle.Width, ClientRectangle.Height);
     Invalidate(myRect);
}
```

Figure 20-10 shows the result (with the text rendered in Wingdings!).


Swelling Font App
Configure
Arial Arial Black Arial Narrow Book Antiqua
Bookman Old Style Bookshelf Symbol 7
Century Gothic Comic Sans MS Courier New
Estrangelo Edessa Franklin Gothic Medium
Garamond Gautami Georgia Haettenschweiler
Impact Latha Lucida Console Lucida Sans
Unicode Mangal Marlett Microsoft Sans Serif
Monotype Corsiva MS Outlook MS Reference
Sans Serif MS Reference Specialty MV Boli
Nina Palatino Linotype Raavi Shruti Sylfaen
Symbol Tahoma Times New Roman Trebuchet
MS Tunga Verdana Webdings Wingdings

Figure 20-10. *The FontApp application in action*

■ **Source Code** The SwellingFontApp project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

The FontDialog Class

As you might assume, there is an existing font dialog box (`FontDialog`), as shown in Figure 20-11.



Figure 20-11. *The Windows Forms Font dialog box*

Like the `ColorDialog` type examined earlier in this chapter, when you wish to work with the `FontDialog`, simply call the `ShowDialog()` method. Using the `Font` property, you may extract the

characteristics of the current selection for use in the application. To illustrate, here is a Form that mimics the logic of the previous `ColorDlg` project. When the user clicks anywhere on the Form, the Font dialog box displays and renders a message with the current selection:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    private FontDialog fontDlg = new FontDialog();
    private Font currFont = new Font("Times New Roman", 12);
    public MainForm()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
        CenterToScreen();
    }
    private void MainForm_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
    {
        if (fontDlg.ShowDialog() != DialogResult.Cancel)
        {
            currFont = fontDlg.Font;
            this.Text = string.Format("Selected Font: {0}", currFont);
            Invalidate();
        }
    }
    private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        g.DrawString("Testing...", currFont, Brushes.Black, 0, 0);
    }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The FontDlgForm application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Survey of the System.Drawing.Drawing2D Namespace

Now that you have manipulated `Font` types, the next task is to examine how to manipulate `Pen` and `Brush` objects to render geometric patterns. While you could do so making use of nothing more than `Brushes` and `Pens` helper types to obtain preconfigured types in a solid color, you should be aware that many of the more "exotic" pens and brushes are found within the `System.Drawing.Drawing2D` namespace.

This additional GDI+ namespace provides a number of classes that allow you to modify the end cap (triangle, diamond, etc.) used for a given pen, build textured brushes, and work with vector graphic manipulations. Some core types to be aware of (grouped by related functionality) are shown in Table 20-6.

Table 20-6. *Classes of* `System.Drawing.Drawing2D`

Classes	Meaning in Life
`AdjustableArrowCap` `CustomLineCap`	Pen caps are used to paint the beginning and end points of a given line. These types represent an adjustable arrow-shaped and user-defined cap.
`Blend` `ColorBlend`	These classes are used to define a blend pattern (and colors) used in conjunction with a `LinearGradientBrush`.

Classes	Meaning in Life

`GraphicsPath`
`GraphicsPathIterator`
`PathData`
	A `GraphicsPath` object represents a series of lines and curves. This class allows you to insert just about any type of geometrical pattern (arcs, rectangles, lines, strings, polygons, etc.) into the path. `PathData` holds the graphical data that makes up a path.

`HatchBrush`
`LinearGradientBrush`
`PathGradientBrush`
	These are exotic brush types.

Also be aware that the `System.Drawing.Drawing2D` namespace defines another set of enumerations (`DashStyle`, `FillMode`, `HatchStyle`, `LineCap`, and so forth) that are used in conjunction with these core types.

Working with Pens

GDI+ `Pen` types are used to draw lines between two end points. However, a `Pen` in and of itself is of little value. When you need to render a geometric shape onto a `Control`-derived type, you send a valid `Pen` type to any number of render methods defined by the `Graphics` class. In general, the `DrawXXX()` methods are used to render some set of lines to a graphics surface and are typically used with `Pen` objects.

The `Pen` type defines a small set of constructors that allow you to determine the initial color and width of the pen nib. Most of a `Pen`'s functionality comes by way of its supported properties. Table 20-7 gives a partial list.

Table 20-7. `Pen` *Properties*

Properties	Meaning in Life
`Brush`	Determines the `Brush` used by this `Pen`.
`Color`	Determines the `Color` type used by this `Pen`.
`CustomStartCap` `CustomEndCap`	Gets or sets a custom cap style to use at the beginning or end of lines drawn with this `Pen`. *Cap style* is simply the term used to describe how the initial and final stroke of the `Pen` should look and feel. These properties allow you to build custom caps for your `Pen` types.
`DashCap`	Gets or sets the cap style used at the beginning or end of dashed lines drawn with this `Pen`.
`DashPattern`	Gets or sets an array of custom dashes and spaces. The dashes are made up of line segments.
`DashStyle`	Gets or sets the style used for dashed lines drawn with this `Pen`.
`StartCap` `EndCap`	Gets or sets the predefined cap style used at the beginning or end of lines drawn with this `Pen`. Set the cap of your `Pen` using the `LineCap` enumeration defined in the `System.Drawing.Drawing2D` namespace.
`Width`	Gets or sets the width of this `Pen`.
`DashOffset`	Gets or sets the distance from the start of a line to the beginning of a dash pattern.

Remember that in addition to the `Pen` type, GDI+ provides a `Pens` collection. Using a number of static properties, you are able to retrieve a `Pen` (or a given color) on the fly, rather than creating a custom `Pen` by hand. Be aware, however, that the `Pen` types returned will always have a width of 1.

If you require a more exotic pen, you will need to build a Pen type by hand. This being said, let's render some geometric images using simple Pen types. Assume you have a main Form object that is capable of responding to paint requests. The implementation is as follows:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     // Make a big blue pen.
     Pen bluePen = new Pen(Color.Blue, 20);

     // Get a stock pen from the Pens type.
     Pen pen2 = Pens.Firebrick;

     // Render some shapes with the pens.
     g.DrawEllipse(bluePen, 10, 10, 100, 100);
     g.DrawLine(pen2, 10, 130, 110, 130);
     g.DrawPie(Pens.Black, 150, 10, 120, 150, 90, 80);

     // Draw a purple dashed polygon as well...
     Pen pen3 = new Pen(Color.Purple, 5);
     pen3.DashStyle = DashStyle.DashDotDot;
     g.DrawPolygon(pen3, new Point[]{new Point(30, 140),
          new Point(265, 200), new Point(100, 225),
          new Point(190, 190), new Point(50, 330),
          new Point(20, 180)});

     // And a rectangle containing some text...
     Rectangle r = new Rectangle(150, 10, 130, 60);
     g.DrawRectangle(Pens.Blue, r);
     g.DrawString("Hello out there...How are ya?",
                  new Font("Arial", 12), Brushes.Black, r);
}
```

Notice that the Pen used to render your polygon makes use of the DashStyle enumeration (defined in System.Drawing.Drawing2D):

```
public enum DashStyle
{
     Solid, Dash, Dot,
     DashDot, DashDotDot, Custom
}
```

In addition to the preconfigured DashStyles, you are able to define custom patterns using the DashPattern property of the Pen type:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
...
     // Draw custom dash pattern all around the border of the form.
     Pen customDashPen = new Pen(Color.BlueViolet, 10);
     float[] myDashes = { 5.0f, 2.0f, 1.0f, 3.0f };
     customDashPen.DashPattern = myDashes;
     g.DrawRectangle(customDashPen, ClientRectangle);
}
```

Figure 20-12 shows the final output of this Paint event handler.

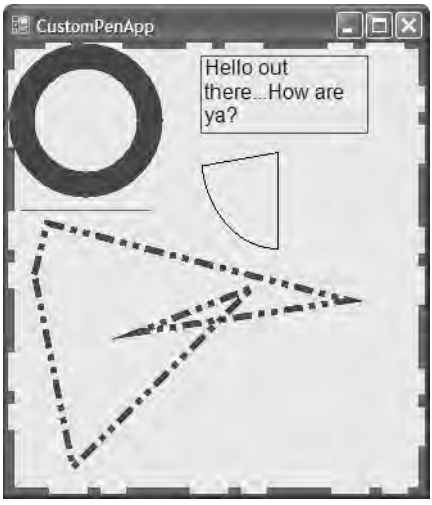


Figure 20-12. *Working with* `Pen` *types*

■ **Source Code** The CustomPenApp project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Working with Pen Caps

If you examine the output of the previous pen example, you should notice that the beginning and end of each line was rendered using a standard pen protocol (an end cap composed of 90 degree angles). Using the `LineCap` enumeration, however, you are able to build `Pens` that exhibit a bit more flair:

```
public enum LineCap
{
     Flat, Square, Round,
     Triangle, NoAnchor,
     SquareAnchor, RoundAnchor,
     DiamondAnchor, ArrowAnchor,
     AnchorMask, Custom
}
```

To illustrate, the following Pens application draws a series of lines using each of the `LineCap` styles. The end result can be seen in Figure 20-13.

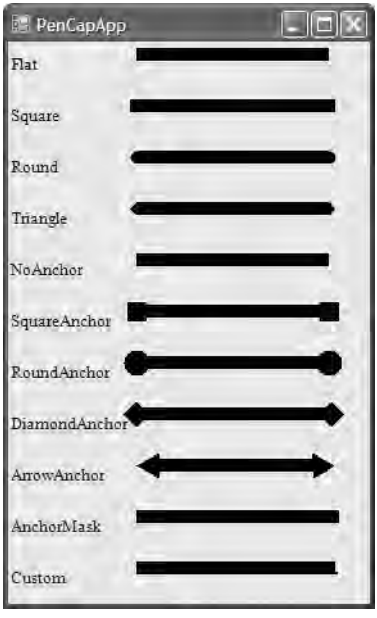


Figure 20-13. *Working with pen caps*

The code simply loops through each member of the `LineCap` enumeration and prints out the name of the item (e.g., `ArrowAnchor`). It then configures and draws a line with the current cap:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     Pen thePen = new Pen(Color.Black, 10);
     int yOffSet = 10;
     // Get all members of the LineCap enum.
     Array obj = Enum.GetValues(typeof(LineCap));

     // Draw a line with a LineCap member.
     for(int x = 0; x < obj.Length; x++)
     {
          // Get next cap and configure pen.
          LineCap temp = (LineCap)obj.GetValue(x);
          thePen.StartCap = temp;
          thePen.EndCap = temp;

          // Print name of LineCap enum.
          g.DrawString(temp.ToString(), new Font("Times New Roman", 10),
                       new SolidBrush(Color.Black), 0, yOffSet);

          // Draw a line with the correct cap.
          g.DrawLine(thePen, 100, yOffSet, Width - 50, yOffSet);
          yOffSet += 40;
     }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The PenCapApp project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Working with Brushes

`System.Drawing.Brush`-derived types are used to fill a region with a given color, pattern, or image. The `Brush` class itself is an abstract type and cannot be directly created. However, `Brush` serves as a base class to the other related brush types (e.g., `SolidBrush`, `HatchBrush`, `LinearGradientBrush`, and so forth). In addition to specific `Brush`-derived types, the `System.Drawing` namespace also defines two helper classes that return a configured brush using a number of static properties: `Brushes` and `SystemBrushes`. In any case, once you obtain a brush, you are able to call any number of the `FillXXX()` methods of the `Graphics` type.

Interestingly enough, you are also able to build a custom `Pen` type based on a given brush. In this way, you are able to build some brush of interest (e.g., a brush that paints a bitmap image) and render geometric patterns with configured `Pen`. To illustrate, here is a small sample program that makes use of various `Brushes`:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;

     // Make a blue SolidBrush.
     SolidBrush blueBrush = new SolidBrush(Color.Blue);
     // Get a stock brush from the Brushes type.
     SolidBrush pen2 = (SolidBrush)Brushes.Firebrick;
     // Render some shapes with the brushes.
     g.FillEllipse(blueBrush, 10, 10, 100, 100);
     g.FillPie(Brushes.Black, 150, 10, 120, 150, 90, 80);
     // Draw a purple polygon as well...
     SolidBrush brush3= new SolidBrush(Color.Purple);
     g.FillPolygon(brush3, new Point[]{ new Point(30, 140),
          new Point(265, 200), new Point(100, 225),
          new Point(190, 190), new Point(50, 330),
          new Point(20, 180)} );
     // And a rectangle with some text...
     Rectangle r = new Rectangle(150, 10, 130, 60);
     g.FillRectangle(Brushes.Blue, r);
     g.DrawString("Hello out there...How are ya?",
                  new Font("Arial", 12), Brushes.White, r);
}
```

If you can't tell, this application is little more than the CustomPenApp program, this time making use of the `FillXXX()` methods and `SolidBrush` types, rather than pens and the related `DrawXXX()` methods. Figure 20-14 shows the output.

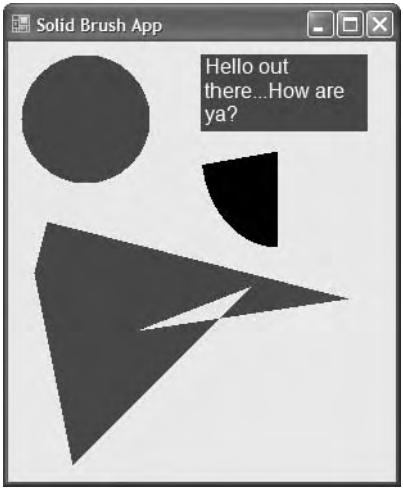


Figure 20-14. *Working with* `Brush` *types*

■ **Source Code** The SolidBrushApp project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Working with HatchBrushes

The `System.Drawing.Drawing2D` namespace defines a `Brush`-derived type named `HatchBrush`. This type allows you to fill a region using a (very large) number of predefined patterns, represented by the `HatchStyle` enumeration. Here is a partial list of names:

```
public enum HatchStyle
{
    Horizontal, Vertical, ForwardDiagonal,
    BackwardDiagonal, Cross, DiagonalCross,
    LightUpwardDiagonal, DarkDownwardDiagonal,
    DarkUpwardDiagonal, LightVertical,
    NarrowHorizontal, DashedDownwardDiagonal,
    SmallConfetti, LargeConfetti, ZigZag,
    Wave, DiagonalBrick, Divot, DottedGrid, Sphere,
    OutlinedDiamond, SolidDiamond,
...
}
```

When constructing a `HatchBrush`, you need to specify the foreground and background colors to use during the fill operation. To illustrate, let's rework the logic seen previously in the PenCapApp example:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    int yOffSet = 10;
```

```
    // Get all members of the HatchStyle enum.
    Array obj = Enum.GetValues(typeof(HatchStyle));
    // Draw an oval with first 5 HatchStyle values.
    for (int x = 0; x < 5; x++)
    {
        // Configure Brush.
        HatchStyle temp = (HatchStyle)obj.GetValue(x);
        HatchBrush theBrush = new HatchBrush(temp,
                Color.White, Color.Black);
        // Print name of HatchStyle enum.
        g.DrawString(temp.ToString(), new Font("Times New Roman", 10),
             Brushes.Black, 0, yOffSet);
        // Fill a rectangle with the correct brush.
        g.FillEllipse(theBrush, 150, yOffSet, 200, 25);
        yOffSet += 40;
    }
}
```

The output renders a filled oval for the first five hatch values (see Figure 20-15).

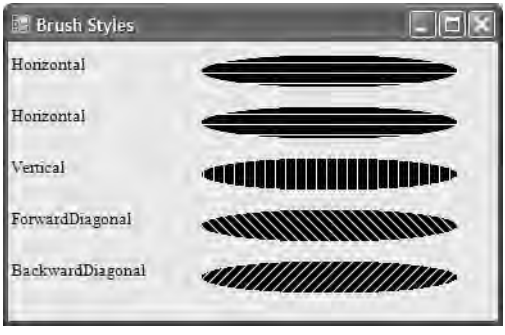


Figure 20-15. *Select hatch styles*

■ **Source Code** The BrushStyles application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Working with TextureBrushes

The `TextureBrush` type allows you to attach a bitmap image to a brush, which can then be used in conjunction with a fill operation. In just a few pages, you will learn about the details of the GDI+ `Image` class. For the time being, understand that a `TextureBrush` is assigned an `Image` reference for use during its lifetime. The image itself is typically found stored in some local file (`*.bmp`, `*.gif`, `*.jpg`) or embedded into a .NET assembly.

Let's build a sample application that makes use of the `TextureBrush` type. One brush is used to paint the entire client area with the image found in a file named `clouds.bmp`, while the other brush is used to paint text with the image found within `soap bubbles.bmp`. The output is shown in Figure 20-16.



Figure 20-16. *Bitmaps as brushes*

To begin, your `Form`-derived class maintains two `Brush` member variables, which are assigned to a new `TextureBrush` in the constructor. Notice that the constructor of the `TextureBrush` type requires a type derived from `Image`:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     // Data for the image brush.
     private Brush texturedTextBrush;
     private Brush texturedBGroundBrush;

     public MainForm()
     {
          ...
          // Load image for background brush.
          Image bGroundBrushImage = new Bitmap("Clouds.bmp");
          texturedBGroundBrush = new TextureBrush(bGroundBrushImage);

          // Now load image for text brush.
          Image textBrushImage = new Bitmap("Soap Bubbles.bmp");
          texturedTextBrush = new TextureBrush(textBrushImage);
     }
}
```

■ **Note** The `*.bmp` files used in this example must be in the same folder as the application (or specified using hard-coded paths). We'll address this limitation later in this chapter.

Now that you have two `TextureBrush` types to render with, the `Paint` event handler is quite straightforward:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     Rectangle r = ClientRectangle;
     // Paint the clouds on the client area.
     g.FillRectangle(texturedBGroundBrush, r);
     // Some big bold text with a textured brush.
     g.DrawString("Bitmaps as brushes!  Way cool...",
          new Font("Arial", 30,
          FontStyle.Bold | FontStyle.Italic),  texturedTextBrush, r);
}
```

■ **Source Code** The TexturedBrushes application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Working with LinearGradientBrushes

Last but not least is the `LinearGradientBrush` type, which you can use whenever you want to blend two colors together in a gradient pattern. Working with this type is just as simple as working with the other brush types. The only point of interest is that when you build a `LinearGradientBrush`, you need to specify a pair of `Color` types and the direction of the blend via the `LinearGradientMode` enumeration:

```
public enum LinearGradientMode
{
     Horizontal, Vertical,
     ForwardDiagonal, BackwardDiagonal
}
```

To test each value, let's render a series of rectangles using a `LinearGradientBrush`:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     Rectangle r = new Rectangle(10, 10, 100, 100);
     // A gradient brush.
     LinearGradientBrush theBrush = null;
     int yOffSet = 10;
     // Get all members of the LinearGradientMode enum.
     Array obj = Enum.GetValues(typeof(LinearGradientMode));
     // Draw an oval with a LinearGradientMode member.
     for(int x = 0; x < obj.Length; x++)
     {
          // Configure Brush.
          LinearGradientMode temp = (LinearGradientMode)obj.GetValue(x);
          theBrush = new LinearGradientBrush(r, Color.GreenYellow,
                                             Color.Blue, temp);
          // Print name of LinearGradientMode enum.
          g.DrawString(temp.ToString(), new Font("Times New Roman", 10),
                       new SolidBrush(Color.Black), 0, yOffSet);
          // Fill a rectangle with the correct brush.
          g. FillRectangle(theBrush, 150, yOffSet, 200, 50);
          yOffSet += 80;
     }
}
```

Figure 20-17 shows the end result.

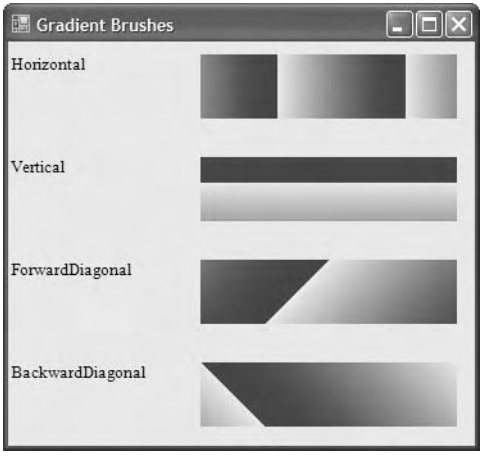


Figure 20-17. *Gradient brushes at work*

■ **Source Code** The GradientBrushes application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Rendering Images

At this point, you have examined how to manipulate three of the four major GDI+ types: fonts, pens, and brushes. The final type you'll examine in this chapter is the `Image` class and related subtypes. The abstract `System.Drawing.Image` type defines a number of methods and properties that hold various bits of information regarding the underlying image data it represents. For example, the `Image` class supplies the `Width`, `Height`, and `Size` properties to retrieve the dimensions of the image. Other properties allow you to gain access to the underlying palette. The `Image` class defines the core members shown in Table 20-8.

Table 20-8. *Members of the* `Image` *Type*

Members	Meaning in Life
`FromFile()`	This static method creates an `Image` from the specified file.
`FromStream()`	This static method creates an `Image` from the specified data stream.

`Height`
`Width`
`Size`
`HorizontalResolution`
`VerticalResolution`
	These properties return information regarding the dimensions of this `Image`.

`Palette`	This property returns a `ColorPalette` data type that represents the underlying palette used for this `Image`.
`GetBounds()`	This method returns a `Rectangle` that represents the current size of this `Image`.
`Save()`	This method saves the data held in an `Image`-derived type to file.

Given that the abstract `Image` class cannot be directly created, you typically make a direct instance of the `Bitmap` type. Assume you have some `Form`-derived class that renders three bitmaps

into the client area. Once you fill the `Bitmap` types with the correct image file, simply render each one within your `Paint` event handler using the `Graphics.DrawImage()` method:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    private Bitmap[] myImages = new Bitmap[3];
    public MainForm()
    {
        // Load some local images.
        myImages[0] = new Bitmap("imageA.bmp");
        myImages[1] = new Bitmap("imageB.bmp");
        myImages[2] = new Bitmap("imageC.bmp");
        CenterToScreen();
        InitializeComponent();
    }

    private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        // Render all three images.
        int yOffset = 10;
        foreach (Bitmap b in myImages)
        {
            g.DrawImage(b, 10, yOffset, 90, 90);
            yOffset += 100;
        }
    }
}
```

■ **Note** The `*.bmp` files used in this example must be in the same folder as the application (or specified using hard-coded paths). We'll resolve this limitation later in this chapter.

Figure 20-18 shows the output.



Figure 20-18. *Rendering images*

Finally, be aware that regardless of its name, the `Bitmap` class can contain image data stored in any number of file formats (`*.tif`, `*.gif`, `*.bmp`, etc.).

■ **Source Code** The BasicImages application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Dragging and Hit Testing the PictureBox Control

While you are free to render `Bitmap` images directly onto any `Control`-derived class, you will find that you gain far greater control and functionality if you instead choose to make use of a `PictureBox` type to contain your image. For example, because the `PictureBox` type "is-a" `Control`, you inherit a great deal of functionality, such as the ability to handle various events, assign a tool tip or context menu, and so forth. While you could achieve similar behaviors using a raw `Bitmap`, you would be required to author a fair amount of boilerplate code.

To showcase the usefulness of the `PictureBox` type, let's create a simple "game" that illustrates the ability to capture mouse activity over a graphical image. If the user clicks the mouse somewhere within the bounds of the image, he is in "dragging" mode and can move the image around the Form. To make things more interesting, let's monitor where the user releases the image. If it is within the bounds of a GDI+-rendered rectangle, you'll take some additional course of action (seen shortly). As you may know, the process of testing for mouse click events within a specific region is termed *hit testing*.

The `PictureBox` type gains most of its functionality from the `Control` base class. You've already explored a number of `Control`'s members in the previous chapter, so let's quickly turn your attention to the process of assigning an image to the `PictureBox` member variable using the `Image` property (again, the `happyDude.bmp` file must be in the application directory):

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     // This holds an image of a smiley face.
     private PictureBox happyBox = new PictureBox();

     public MainForm()
     {
          // Configure the PictureBox.
          happyBox.SizeMode = PictureBoxSizeMode.StretchImage;
          happyBox.Location = new System.Drawing.Point(64, 32);
          happyBox.Size = new System.Drawing.Size(50, 50);
          happyBox.Cursor = Cursors.Hand;
          happyBox.Image = new Bitmap("happyDude.bmp");

          // Now add to the Form's Controls collection.
          Controls.Add(happyBox);
     }
}
```

Beyond the `Image` property, the only other property of interest is `SizeMode`, which makes use of the `PictureBoxSizeMode` enumeration. This type is used to control how the associated image should be rendered within the bounding rectangle of the `PictureBox`. Here, you assigned `PictureBoxSizeMode.StretchImage`, indicating that you wish to skew the image over the entire area of the `PictureBox` type (which is set to 50×50 pixels).

The next task is to handle the `MouseMove`, `MouseUp`, and `MouseDown` events for the `PictureBox` member variable using the expected C# event syntax:

```
public MainForm()
{
...
    // Add handlers for the following events.
    happyBox.MouseDown += new MouseEventHandler(happyBox_MouseDown);
    happyBox.MouseUp += new MouseEventHandler(happyBox_MouseUp);
    happyBox.MouseMove += new MouseEventHandler(happyBox_MouseMove);
    Controls.Add(happyBox);
    InitializeComponent();
}
```

The `MouseDown` event handler is in charge of storing the incoming (*x*, *y*) location of the cursor within two `System.Int32` member variables (`oldX` and `oldY`) for later use, as well as setting a `System.Boolean` member variable (`isDragging`) to true, to indicate that a drag operation is in process. Add these member variables to your Form and implement the `MouseDown` event handler as so:

```
private void happyBox_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
{
     isDragging = true;
     oldX = e.X;
     oldY = e.Y;
}
```

The `MouseMove` event handler simply relocates the position of the `PictureBox` (using the `Top` and `Left` properties) by offsetting the current cursor location with the integer data captured during the `MouseDown` event:

```
private void happyBox_MouseMove(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
{
     if (isDragging)
     {
          // Need to figure new Y value based on where the mouse
          // down click happened.
          happyBox.Top = happyBox.Top + (e.Y - oldY);
          // Same process for X (use oldX as a baseline).
          happyBox.Left = happyBox.Left + (e.X - oldX);
     }
}
```

The `MouseUp` event handler sets the `isDragging` Boolean to false, to signal the end of the drag operation. As well, if the `MouseUp` event occurs when the `PictureBox` is contained within our GDI+-rendered `Rectangle` image, you can assume the user has won the (albeit rather simplistic) game. First, add a `Rectangle` member variable (named `dropRect`) to your `Form` class set to a given size:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     private PictureBox happyBox = new PictureBox();
     private int oldX, oldY;
     private bool isDragging;
     private Rectangle dropRect = new Rectangle(100, 100, 140, 170);
...
}
```

The `MouseUp` event handler can now be implemented as so:

```
private void happyBox_MouseUp(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
{
     isDragging = false;

     // Is the mouse within the area of the drop rect?
```

```
    if(dropRect.Contains(happyBox.Bounds))
        MessageBox.Show("You win!", "What an amazing test of skill...");
}
```

Finally, you need to render the rectangular area (maintained by the `dropRect` member variable) on the Form within a `Paint` event handler:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    // Draw the drop box.
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    g.FillRectangle(Brushes.AntiqueWhite, dropRect);
    // Display instructions.
    g.DrawString("Drag the happy guy in here...",
        new Font("Times New Roman", 25), Brushes.Red, dropRect);
}
```

When you run the application, you are presented with what appears in Figure 20-19.



Figure 20-19. *The amazing happy-dude game*

If you have what it takes to win the game, you are rewarded with the kudos shown in Figure 20-20.

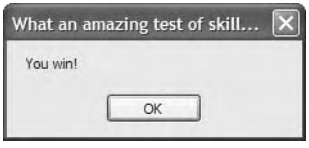


Figure 20-20. *You have nerves of steel!*

■ **Source Code** The DraggingImages application is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Hit Testing Rendered Images

Validating a hit test against a `Control`-derived type (such as the `PictureBox`) is very simple, as it can respond directly to mouse events. However, what if you wish to perform a hit test on a geometric shape rendered directly on the surface of a Form?

To illustrate the process, let's revisit the previous `BasicImages` application and add some new functionality. The goal is to determine when the user clicks one of the three images. Once you discover which image was clicked, you'll adjust the `Text` property of the Form and highlight the image with a 5-pixel outline.

The first step is to define a new set of member variables in the `Form` type that represents the `Rectangles` you will be testing against in the `MouseDown` event. When this event occurs, you need to programmatically figure out if the incoming (*x*, *y*) coordinate is somewhere within the bounds of the `Rectangles` used to represent the dimension of each `Image`. If the user does click a given image, you set a private Boolean member variable (`isImageClicked`) to true and indicate which image was selected via another member variable of a custom enumeration named `ClickedImage`, defined as so:

```
enum ClickedImage
{
    ImageA, ImageB, ImageC
}
```

With this, here is the initial update to the `Form`-derived class:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    private Bitmap[] myImages = new Bitmap[3];
    private Rectangle[] imageRects = new Rectangle[3];
    private bool isImageClicked = false;
    ClickedImage imageClicked = ClickedImage.ImageA;

    public MainForm()
    {
...
        // Set up the rectangles.
        imageRects[0] = new Rectangle(10, 10, 90, 90);
        imageRects[1] = new Rectangle(10, 110, 90, 90);
        imageRects[2] = new Rectangle(10, 210, 90, 90);
    }

    private void MainForm_MouseDown(object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
    {
        // Get (x, y) of mouse click.
        Point mousePt = new Point(e.X, e.Y);

        // See if the mouse is anywhere in the 3 Rectangles.
        if (imageRects[0].Contains(mousePt))
        {
            isImageClicked = true;
            imageClicked = ClickedImage.ImageA;
            this.Text = "You clicked image A";
        }
        else if (imageRects[1].Contains(mousePt))
        {
            isImageClicked = true;
            imageClicked = ClickedImage.ImageB;
            this.Text = "You clicked image B";
        }
        else if (imageRects[2].Contains(mousePt))
```

```
        {
            isImageClicked = true;
            imageClicked = ClickedImage.ImageC;
            this.Text = "You clicked image C";
        }
        else     // Not in any shape, set defaults.
        {
            isImageClicked = false;
            this.Text = "Hit Testing Images";
        }
        // Redraw the client area.
        Invalidate();
    }
}
```

Notice that the final conditional check sets the `isImageClicked` member variable to false, indicating that the user did not click one of the three images. This is important, as you want to erase the outline of the previously selected image. Once all items have been checked, invalidate the client area. Here is the updated `Paint` handler:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;

    // Render all three images.
...
    // Draw outline (if clicked)
    if (isImageClicked == true)
    {
        Pen outline = new Pen(Color.Tomato, 5);
        switch (imageClicked)
        {
            case ClickedImage.ImageA:
                g.DrawRectangle(outline, imageRects[0]);
                break;
            case ClickedImage.ImageB:
                g.DrawRectangle(outline, imageRects[1]);
                break;
            case ClickedImage.ImageC:
                g.DrawRectangle(outline, imageRects[2]);
                break;
            default:
                break;
        }
    }
}
```

At this point, you should be able to run your application and validate that an outline appears around each image that has been clicked (and that no outline is present when you click outside the bounds of said images).

Hit Testing Nonrectangular Images

Now, what if you wish to perform a hit test in a nonrectangular region, rather than a simple square? Assume you updated your application to render an oddball geometric shape that will also sport an outline when clicked (see Figure 20-21).

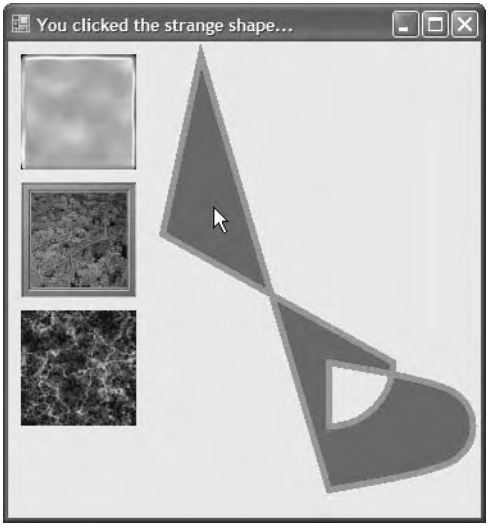


Figure 20-21. *Hit-testing polygons*

This geometric image was rendered on the Form using the `FillPath()` method of the `Graphics` type. This method takes an instance of a `GraphicsPath` object, which encapsulates a series of connected lines, curves, and strings. Adding new items to a `GraphicsPath` instance is achieved using a number of related `Add` methods, as described in Table 20-9.

Table 20-9. `Add`-*Centric Methods of the* `GraphicsPath` *Class*

Methods	Meaning in Life
`AddArc()`	Appends an elliptical arc to the current figure
`AddBezier()` `AddBeziers()`	Adds a cubic Bezier curve (or set of Bezier curves) to the current figure
`AddClosedCurve()`	Adds a closed curve to the current figure
`AddCurve()`	Adds a curve to the current figure
`AddEllipse()`	Adds an ellipse to the current figure
`AddLine()` `AddLines()`	Appends a line segment to the current figure
`AddPath()`	Appends the specified `GraphicsPath` to the current figure
`AddPie()`	Adds the outline of a pie shape to the current figure
`AddPolygon()`	Adds a polygon to the current figure
`AddRectangle()` `AddRectangles()`	Adds one (or more) rectangle to the current figure
`AddString()`	Adds a text string to the current figure

Specify that you are "using" `System.Drawing.Drawing2D` and add a new `GraphicsPath` member variable to your `Form`-derived class. In the Form's constructor, build the set of items that represent your path as follows:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     GraphicsPath myPath = new GraphicsPath();
...
     public MainForm()
     {
          // Create an interesting path.
          myPath.StartFigure();
          myPath.AddLine(new Point(150, 10), new Point(120, 150));
          myPath.AddArc(200, 200, 100, 100, 0, 90);
          Point point1 = new Point(250, 250);
          Point point2 = new Point(350, 275);
          Point point3 = new Point(350, 325);
          Point point4 = new Point(250, 350);
          Point[] points = { point1, point2, point3, point4} ;
          myPath.AddCurve(points);
          myPath.CloseFigure();
     ...
     }
}
```

Notice the calls to `StartFigure()` and `CloseFigure()`. When you call `StartFigure()`, you are able to insert a new item into the current path you are building. A call to `CloseFigure()` closes the current figure and begins a new figure (if you require one). Also know that if the figure contains a sequence of connected lines and curves (as in the case of the `myPath` instance), the loop is closed by connecting a line from the endpoint to the starting point. First, add an additional name to the `ImageClicked` enumeration named `StrangePath`:

```
enum ClickedImage
{
    ImageA, ImageB,
    ImageC, StrangePath
}
```

Next, update your existing `MouseDown` event handler to test for the presence of the cursor's (*x*, *y*) position within the bounds of the `GraphicsPath`. Like a `Region` type, this can be discovered using the `IsVisible()` member:

```
protected void OnMouseDown (object sender, MouseEventArgs e)
{
     // Get (x, y) of mouse click.
     Point mousePt = new Point(e.X, e.Y);
     ...
     else if(myPath.IsVisible(mousePt))
     {
          isImageClicked = true;
          imageClicked = ClickedImage.StrangePath;
          this.Text = "You clicked the strange shape...";
     }
...
}
```

Finally, update the `Paint` handler as follows:

```
private void MainForm_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
     Graphics g = e.Graphics;
     ...
     // Draw the graphics path.
     g.FillPath(Brushes.Sienna, myPath);
```

```
    // Draw outline (if clicked)
    if(isImageClicked == true)
    {
        Pen outline = new Pen(Color.Red, 5);
        switch(imageClicked)
        {
            ...
            case ClickedImage.StrangePath:
                g.DrawPath(outline, myPath);
                break;
            default:
                break;
        }
    }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The HitTestingImages project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Understanding the .NET Resource Format

Up to this point in the chapter, each application that made use of external resources (such as bitmap files) demanded that the image files be within the client's application directory. Given this, you loaded your `*.bmp` files using an absolute name:

```
// Fill the images with bitmaps.
bMapImageA = new Bitmap("imageA.bmp");
bMapImageB = new Bitmap("imageB.bmp");
bMapImageC = new Bitmap("imageC.bmp");
```

This logic, of course, demands that the application directory does indeed contain three files named `imageA.bmp`, `imageB.bmp`, and `imageC.bmp`; otherwise, you will receive a runtime exception.

As you may recall from Chapter 11, an assembly is a collection of types and *optional resources*. Given this, your final task of the chapter is to learn how to bundle external resources (such as image files and strings) into the assembly itself. In this way, your .NET binary is truly self-contained. At the lowest level, bundling external resources into a .NET assembly involves the following steps:

1. Create an `*.resx` file that establishes name/value pairs for each resource in your application via XML data representation.
2. Use the `resgen.exe` command-line utility to convert your XML-based `*.resx` file into a binary equivalent (a `*.resources` file).
3. Using the `/resource` flag of the C# compiler, embed the binary `*.resources` file into your assembly.

As you might suspect, these steps are automated when using Visual Studio 2005. You'll examine how this IDE can assist you in just a moment. For the time being, let's check out how to generate and embed .NET resources at the command line.

The System.Resources Namespace

The key to understanding the .NET resource format is to know the types defined within the `System.Resources` namespace. This set of types provides the programmatic means to read and write `*.resx` (XML-based) and `*.resources` (binary) files, as well as obtain resources embedded in a given assembly. Table 20-10 provides a rundown of the core types.

Table 20-10. *Members of the* `System.Resources` *Namespace*

Members	Meaning in Life
`ResourceReader` `ResourceWriter`	These types allow you to read from and write to binary `*.resources` files.
`ResXResourceReader` `ResXResourceWriter`	These types allow you to read from and write to XML-based `*.resx` files.
`ResourceManager`	This type allows you to programmatically obtain embedded resources from a given assembly.

Programmatically Creating an *.resx File

As mentioned, an `*.resx` file is a block of XML data that assigns name/value pairs for each resource in your application. The `ResXResourceWriter` class provides a set of members that allow you to create the `*.resx` file, add binary and string-based resources, and commit them to storage. To illustrate, let's create a simple application (`ResXWriter`) that will generate an `*.resx` file containing an entry for the `happyDude.bmp` file (first seen in the `DraggingImages` example) and a single string resource. The GUI consists of a single `Button` type (see Figure 20-22).



Figure 20-22. *The ResX application*

The `Click` event handler for the `Button` adds the `happyDude.bmp` and string resource to the `*.resx` file, which is saved on the local C drive:

```
private void btnGenResX_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Make an resx writer and specify the file to write to.
     ResXResourceWriter w =
          new ResXResourceWriter(@"C:\ResXForm.resx");
     // Add happy dude and string.
     Image i = new Bitmap("happyDude.bmp");
     w.AddResource("happyDude", i);
     w.AddResource("welcomeString", "Hello new resource format!");
     // Commit file.
     w.Generate();
     w.Close();
}
```

The member of interest is `ResXResourceWriter.AddResource()`. This method has been overloaded a few times to allow you to insert binary data (as you did with the `happyDude.bmp` image), as well as textual data (as you have done for your test string). Notice that each version takes two parameters: the name of a given resource in the `*.resx` file and the data itself. The `Generate()` method commits the information to file. At this point, you have an XML description of the image and string resources. To verify, open the new `ResXForm.resx` file using a text editor (see Figure 20-23).

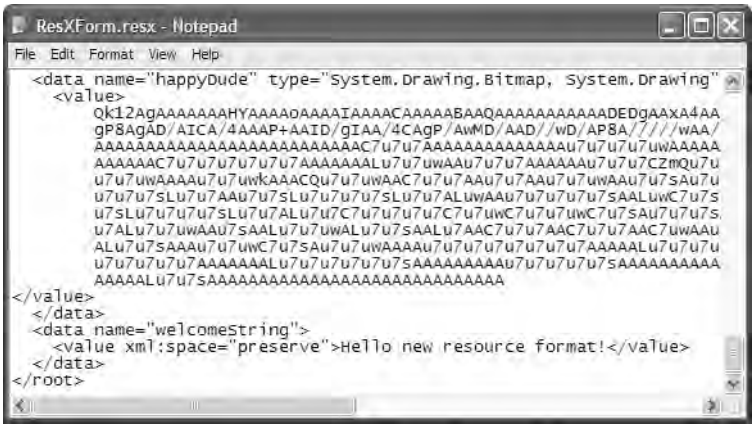


Figure 20-23. `*.resx` *expressed as XML*

Building the *.resources File

Now that you have an `*.resx` file, you can make use of the `resgen.exe` utility to produce the binary equivalent. To do so, open a Visual Studio 2005 command prompt, navigate to your C drive, and issue the following command:

```
resgen resxform.resx resxform.resources
```

You can now open the new `*.resources` file using Visual Studio 2005 and view the binary format (see Figure 20-24).

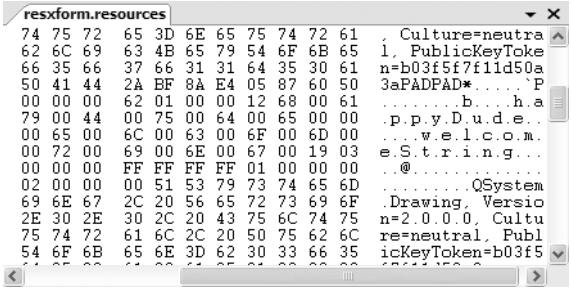


Figure 20-24. *The binary* `*.resources` *file*

Binding the *.resources File into a .NET Assembly

At this point, you are able to embed the `*.resources` file into a .NET assembly using the `/resources` command-line argument of the C# compiler. To illustrate, copy the `Program.cs`, `Form1.cs`, and `Form1.Designer.cs` files to your C drive, open a Visual Studio 2005 command prompt, and issue the following command:

```
csc /resource:resxform.resources /r:System.Drawing.dll *.cs
```

If you were to now open your new assembly using `ildasm.exe`, you would find the manifest has been updated as shown in Figure 20-25.

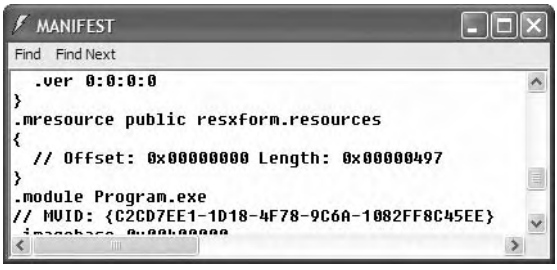


Figure 20-25. *The embedded resources*

Working with ResourceWriters

The previous example made use of the `ResXResourceWriter` types to generate an XML file that contains name/value pairs for each application resource. The resulting `*.resx` file was then run through the `resgen.exe` utility. Finally, the `*.resources` file was embedded into the assembly using the `/resource` flag of the C# compiler. The truth of the matter is that you do not need to build an `*.resx` file (although having an XML representation of your resources can come in handy and is readable). If you do not require an `*.resx` file, you can make use of the `ResourceWriter` type to directly create a binary `*.resources` file:

```
private void GenerateResourceFile()
{
     // Make a new *.resources file.
     ResourceWriter rw;
     rw = new ResourceWriter(@"C:\myResources.resources");

     // Add 1 image and 1 string.
     rw.AddResource("happyDude", new Bitmap("happyDude.bmp"));
     rw.AddResource("welcomeString", "Hello new resource format!");
     rw.Generate();
     rw.Close();
}
```

At this point, the `*.resources` file can be bundled into an assembly using the `/resources` option:

```
csc /resource:myresources.resources *.cs
```

■ **Source Code** The ResXWriter project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Generating Resources using Visual Studio 2005

Although it is possible to work with `*.resx`/`*.resources` files manually at the command line, the good news is that Visual Studio 2005 automates the creation and embedding of your project's resources. To illustrate, create a new Windows Forms application named MyResourcesWinApp. Now, if you open Solution Explorer, you will notice that each Form in your application has an associated `*.resx` file in place automatically (see Figure 20-26).

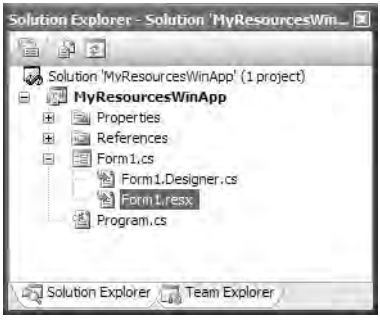


Figure 20-26. *The autogenerated* `*.resx` *files of Visual Studio 2005*

This `*.resx` file will be maintained automatically while you naturally add resources (such as an image in a `PictureBox` widget) using the visual designers. Now, despite what you may be thinking, you should *not* manually update this file to specify your custom resources as Visual Studio 2005 regenerates this file with each compilation. To be sure, you will do well if you allow the IDE to manage a Form's `*.resx` file on your behalf.

When you want to maintain a custom set of resources that are not directly mapped to a given Form, simply insert a new `*.resx` file (named `MyCustomResources.resx` in this example) using the Project ➤ Add New Item menu item (see Figure 20-27).

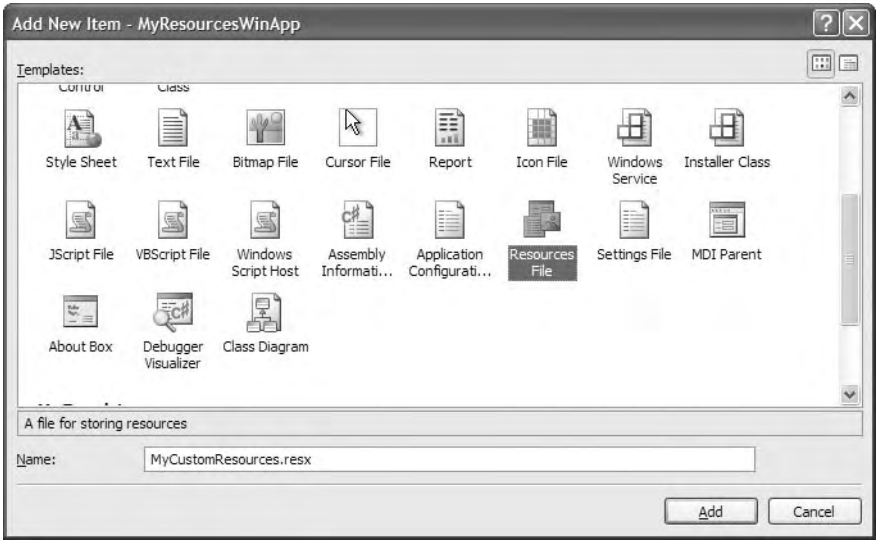


Figure 20-27. *Inserting a new* `*.resx` *file*

If you open your new `*.resx` file, a friendly GUI editor appears that allows you to insert string data, image files, sound clips, and other resources. The leftmost drop-down menu item allows you to select the type of resource you wish to add. First, add a new string resource named WelcomeString that is set to a message of your liking (see Figure 20-28).

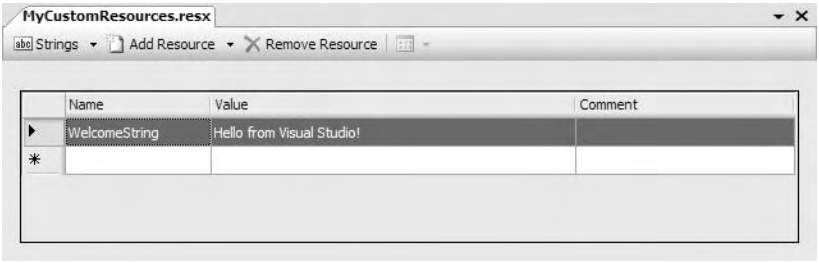


Figure 20-28. *Inserting new string resources with the* `*.resx` *editor*

Next, add the `happyDude.bmp` image file by selecting Images from the leftmost drop-down, choosing the Add Existing File option (see Figure 20-29), and navigating to the `happyDude.bmp` file.

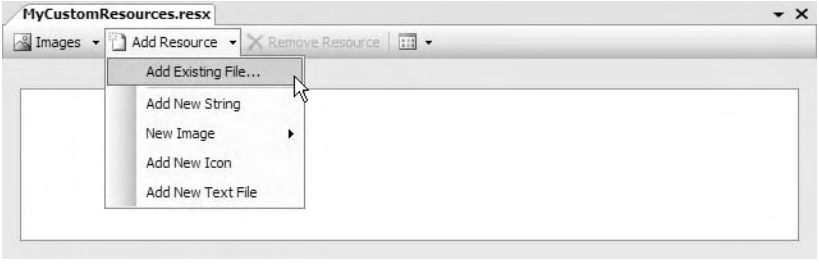


Figure 20-29. *Inserting new* `*.bmp` *resources with the* `*.resx` *editor*

At this point, you will find that the `*.bmp` file has been copied into your application directory. If you select the happyDude icon from the `*.resx` editor, you can now specify that this image should be embedded directly into the assembly (rather than linked as an external stand-alone file) by adjusting the Persistence property (see Figure 20-30).



Figure 20-30. *Embedding specified resources*

Furthermore, Solution Explorer now has a new folder named Resources that contains each item to be embedded into the assembly. As you would guess, if you open a given resource, Visual Studio 2005 launches an associated editor. In any case, if you were to now compile your application, the string and image data will be embedded within your assembly.

Programmatically Reading Resources

Now that you understand the process of embedding resources into your assembly (using `csc.exe` or Visual Studio 2005), you'll need to learn how to programmatically read them for use in your program using the `ResourceManager` type. To illustrate, add a `Button` and `PictureBox` widget on your Form type (see Figure 20-31).

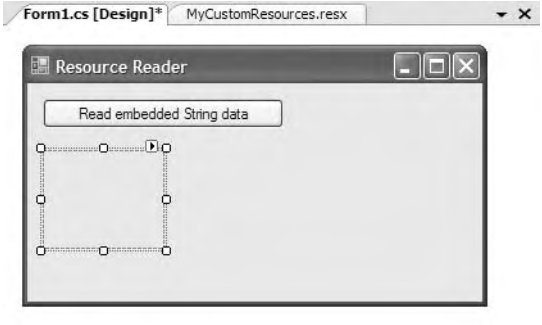


Figure 20-31. *The updated UI*

Next, handle the `Button`'s `Click` event. Update the event handler with the following code:

```
// Be sure to 'use' System.Resources and System.Reflection!
private void btnGetStringData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Make a resource manager.
    ResourceManager rm =
        new ResourceManager("MyResourcesWinApp.MyCustomResources",
        Assembly.GetExecutingAssembly());
    // Get the embedded string (case sensitive!)
    MessageBox.Show(rm.GetString("WelcomeString"));
    // Get the embedded bitmap (case sensitive!)
    myPictureBox.Image = (Bitmap)rm.GetObject("HappyDude");
    // Clean up.
    rm.ReleaseAllResources();
}
```

Notice that the first constructor argument to the `ResourceManager` is the fully qualified name of your `*.resx` file (minus the file extension). The second parameter is a reference to the assembly that contains the embedded resource (which is the current assembly in this case). Once you have created the `ResourceManager`, you can call `GetString()` or `GetObject()` to extract the embedded data. If you were to run the application and click the button, you would find that the string data is displayed in the `MessageBox` and the image data has been extracted from the assembly and placed into the `PictureBox`.

■ **Source Code** The MyResourcesWinApp project is included under the Chapter 20 subdirectory.

Well, that wraps up our examination of GDI+ and the `System.Drawing` namespaces. If you are interested in exploring GDI+ further (including printing support), be sure to check out *GDI+ Programming in C# and VB .NET* by Nick Symmonds (Apress, 2002).

Summary

GDI+ is the name given to a number of related .NET namespaces, each of which is used to render graphic images to a `Control`-derived type. The bulk of this chapter was spent examining how to work with core GDI+ object types such as colors, fonts, graphics images, pens, and brushes in conjunction with the almighty `Graphics` type. Along the way, you examined some GDI+-centric details such as hit testing and how to drag and drop images.

This chapter wrapped up by examining the new .NET resource format. As shown, a `*.resx` denotes resources using a set of name/value pairs describes as XML. This file can be fed into the `resgen.exe` utility, resulting in a binary format (`*.resources`) that can then be embedded into a related assembly. Finally, the `ResourceManager` type provides a simple way to programmatically retrieve embedded resources at runtime.

CHAPTER 21

Programming with Windows Forms Controls

This chapter is concerned with providing a road map of the controls defined in the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace. Chapter 19 already gave you a chance to work with some controls mounted onto a main Form such as `MenuStrip`, `ToolStrip`, and `StatusStrip`. In this chapter, however, you will examine various types that tend to exist within the boundaries of a Form's client area (e.g., `Button`, `MaskedTextBox`, `WebBrowser`, `MonthCalendar`, `TreeView`, and the like). Once you look at the core UI widgets, you will then cover the process of building custom Windows Forms controls that integrate into the Visual Studio 2005 IDE.

The chapter then investigates the process of building custom dialog boxes and the role of *form inheritance*, which allows you to build hierarchies of related Form types. The chapter wraps up with a discussion of how to establish the *docking* and *anchoring* behaviors for your family of GUI types, and the role of the `FlowControlPanel` and `TableControlPanel` types supplied by .NET 2.0.

The World of Windows Forms Controls

The `System.Windows.Forms` namespace contains a number of types that represent common GUI widgets typically used to allow you to respond to user input in a Windows Forms application. Many of the controls you will work with on a day-to-day basis (such as `Button`, `TextBox`, and `Label`) are quite intuitive to work with. Other, more exotic controls and components (such as `TreeView`, `ErrorProvider`, and `TabControl`) require a bit more explanation.

As you learned in Chapter 19, the `System.Windows.Forms.Control` type is the base class for all derived widgets. Recall that `Control` provides the ability to process mouse and keyboard events, establish the physical dimensions and position of the widget using various properties (`Height`, `Width`, `Left`, `Right`, `Location`, etc.), manipulate background and foreground colors, establish the active font/cursor, and so forth. As well, the `Control` base type defines members that control a widget's anchoring and docking behaviors (explained at the conclusion of this chapter).

As you read through this chapter, remember that the widgets you examine here gain a good deal of their functionality from the `Control` base class. Thus, we'll focus (more or less) on the unique members of a given widget. Do understand that this chapter does not attempt to fully describe each and every member of each and every control (that is a task for the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation). Rest assured, though, that once you complete this chapter, you will have no problem understanding the widgets I have not directly described.

■ **Note** Windows Forms provide a number of controls that allow you to display relational data (`DataGridView`, `BindingSource`, etc.). Some of these data-centric controls are examined in Chapter 22 during our discussion of ADO.NET.

Adding Controls to Forms by Hand

Regardless of which type of control you choose to place on a Form, you will follow an identical set of steps to do so. First of all, you must define member variables that represent the controls themselves. Next, inside the Form's constructor (or within a helper method called by the constructor), you'll configure the look and feel of each control using the exposed properties, methods, and events. Finally (and most important), once you've set the control to its initial state, you must add it into the Form's internal controls collection using the inherited `Controls` property. If you forget this final step, your widgets will *not* be visible at runtime.

To illustrate the process of adding controls to a Form, let's begin by building a `Form` type "wizard-free" using your text editor of choice and the C# command-line compiler. Create a new C# file named `ControlsByHand.cs` and code a new `MainWindow` class as so:

```
using System;
using System.Drawing;
using System.Windows.Forms;

namespace ControlsByHand
{
    class MainWindow : Form
    {
        // Form widget member variables.
        private TextBox firstNameBox = new TextBox();
        private Button btnShowControls = new Button();

        public MainWindow()
        {
            // Configure Form.
            this.Text = "Simple Controls";
            this.Width = 300;
            this.Height = 200;
            CenterToScreen();

            // Add a new textbox to the Form.
            firstNameBox.Text = "Hello";
            firstNameBox.Size = new Size(150, 50);
            firstNameBox.Location = new Point(10, 10);
            this.Controls.Add(firstNameBox);

            // Add a new button to the Form.
            btnShowControls.Text = "Click Me";
            btnShowControls.Size = new Size(90, 30);
            btnShowControls.Location = new Point(10, 70);
            btnShowControls.BackColor = Color.DodgerBlue;
            btnShowControls.Click +=
                new EventHandler(btnShowControls_Clicked);
            this.Controls.Add(btnShowControls);
        }
```

```
        // Handle Button's Click event.
        private void btnShowControls_Clicked(object sender, EventArgs e)
        {
            // Call ToString() on each control in the
            // Form's Controls collection
            string ctrlInfo= "";
            foreach (Control c in this.Controls)
            {
                ctrlInfo += string.Format("Control: {0}\n",
                    c.ToString());
            }
            MessageBox.Show(ctrlInfo, "Controls on Form");
        }
    }
}
```

Now, add a second class to the `ControlsByHand` namespace that implements the program's `Main()` method:

```
class Program
{
    public static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Application.Run(new MainWindow());
    }
}
```

At this point, compile your C# file at the command line using the following command:

```
csc /target:winexe *.cs
```

When you run your program and click the Form's button, you will find a message box that lists each item on the Form (see Figure 21-1).

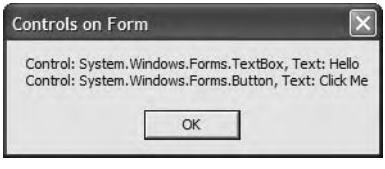


Figure 21-1. *Interacting with the Form's controls collection*

The Control.ControlCollection Type

While the process of adding a new widget to a Form is quite simple, I'd like to discuss the `Controls` property in a bit more detail. This property returns a reference to a nested class named `ControlCollection` defined within the `Control` class. The nested `ControlCollection` type maintains an entry for each widget placed on the Form. You can obtain a reference to this collection anytime you wish to "walk the list" of child widgets:

```
// Get access to the nested ControlCollection for this Form.
Control.ControlCollection coll = this.Controls;
```

Once you have a reference to this collection, you can manipulate its contents using the members shown in Table 21-1.

Table 21-1. `ControlCollection` *Members*

Member	Meaning in Life
`Add()` `AddRange()`	Used to insert a new `Control`-derived type (or array of types) in the collection
`Clear()`	Removes all entries in the collection
`Count`	Returns the number of items in the collection
`GetEnumerator()`	Returns the `IEnumerator` interface for this collection
`Remove()` `RemoveAt()`	Used to remove a control from the collection

Given that a Form maintains a collection of its controls, it is very simple under Windows Forms to dynamically create, remove, or otherwise manipulate visual elements. For example, assume you wish to disable all `Button` types on a given Form (or some such similar operation, such as change the background color of all `TextBoxes`). To do so, you can leverage the C# `is` keyword to determine who's who and change the state of the widgets accordingly:

```
private void DisableAllButtons()
{
    foreach (Control c in this.Controls)
    {
        if (c is Button)
            ((Button)c).Enabled = false;
    }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The ControlsByHand project is included under the Chapter 21 subdirectory.

Adding Controls to Forms Using Visual Studio 2005

Now that you understand the process of adding controls to a Form by hand, let's see how Visual Studio 2005 can automate the process. Create a new Windows Application project for testing purposes named whatever you choose. Similar to the process of designing menu, toolbar, or status bar controls, when you drop a control from the Toolbox onto the Forms designer, the IDE responds by automatically adding the correct member variable to the `*.Designer.cs` file. As well, when you design the look and feel of the widget using the IDE's Properties window, the related code changes are added to the `InitializeComponent()` member function (also located within the `*.Designer.cs` file).

■ **Note** Recall that the Properties window also allows you handle events for a given control when you click the lightning bolt icon. Simply select the widget from the drop-down list and type in the name of the method to be called for the events you are interested in responding to (or just double-click the event to generate a default event handler name).

Assume you have added a `TextBox` and `Button` type to the Forms designer. Notice that when you reposition a control on the designer, the Visual Studio 2005 IDE provides visual hints regarding the spacing and alignment of the current widget (see Figure 21-2).

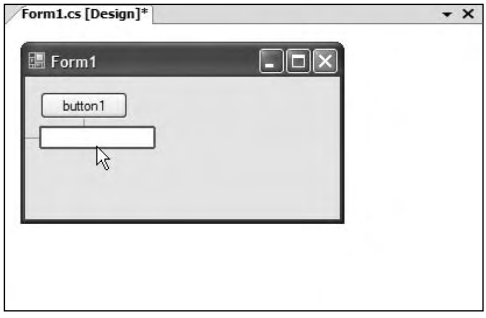


Figure 21-2. *Alignment and spacing hints*

Once you have placed the `Button` and `TextBox` on the designer, examine the code generated in the `InitializeComponent()` method. Here you will find that the types have been `new`-ed and inserted into the Form's `ControlCollection` automatically (in addition to any settings you may have made using the Properties window):

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
    this.btnMyButton = new System.Windows.Forms.Button();
    this.txtMyTextBox = new System.Windows.Forms.TextBox();
...
    // MainWindow
    //
   ...
    this.Controls.Add(this.txtMyTextBox);
    this.Controls.Add(this.btnMyButton);
...
}
```

As you can see, a tool such as Visual Studio 2005 simply saves you some typing time (and helps you avoid hand cramps). Although `InitializeComponent()` is maintained on your behalf, do understand that you are free to configure a given control directly in code anywhere you see necessary (constructors, event handlers, helper functions, etc.). The role of `InitializeComponent()` is simply to establish the initial state of your UI elements. If you want to keep your life simple, I suggest allowing Visual Studio 2005 to maintain `InitializeComponent()` on your behalf, given that the designers may ignore or overwrite edits you make within this method.

Working with the Basic Controls

The `System.Windows.Forms` namespace defines numerous "basic controls" that are commonplace to any windowing framework (buttons, labels, text boxes, check boxes, etc.). Although I would guess you are familiar with the basic operations of such types, let's examine some of the more interesting aspects of the following basic UI elements:

- `Label`, `TextBox`, and `MaskedTextBox`
- `Button`
- `CheckBox`, `RadioButton`, and `GroupBox`
- `CheckedListBox`, `ListBox`, and `ComboBox`

Once you have become comfortable with these basic `Control`-derived types, we will turn our attention to more exotic widgets such as `MonthCalendar`, `TabControl`, `TrackBar`, `WebBrowser`, and so forth.

Fun with Labels

The `Label` control is capable of holding read-only information (text or image based) that explains the role of the other controls to help the user along. Assume you have created a new Visual Studio 2005 Windows Forms project named LabelsAndTextBoxes. Define a method called `CreateLabelControl` in your `Form`-derived type that creates and configures a `Label` type, and then adds it to the Form's controls collection:

```
private void CreateLabelControl()
{
    // Create and configure a Label.
    Label lblInstructions = new Label();
    lblInstructions.Name = "lblInstructions";
    lblInstructions.Text = "Please enter values in all the text boxes";
    lblInstructions.Font = new Font("Times New Roman", 9.75F, FontStyle.Bold);
    lblInstructions.AutoSize = true;
    lblInstructions.Location = new System.Drawing.Point(16, 13);
    lblInstructions.Size = new System.Drawing.Size(240, 16);

    // Add to Form's controls collection.
    Controls.Add(lblInstructions);
}
```

If you were to call this helper function within your Form's constructor, you would find your prompt displayed in the upper portion of the main window:

```
public MainWindow()
{
    InitializeComponent();
    CreateLabelControl();
    CenterToScreen();
}
```

Unlike most other widgets, `Label` controls cannot receive focus via a Tab keypress. However, under .NET 2.0, it is now possible to create *mnemonic keys* for any `Label` by setting the `UseMnemonic` property to true (which happens to be the default setting). Once you have done so, a `Label`'s `Text` property can define a shortcut key (via the ampersand symbol, &), which is used to tab to the control that follows it in the tab order.

■ **Note** You'll learn more about configuring tab order later in this chapter, but for the time being, understand that a control's tab order is established via the `TabIndex` property. By default, a control's `TabIndex` is set based on the order in which it was added to the Forms designer. Thus, if you add a `Label` followed by a `TextBox`, the `Label` is set to `TabIndex 0` while the `TextBox` is set to `TabIndex 1`.

To illustrate, let's now leverage the Forms designer to build a UI containing a set of three `Labels` and three `TextBoxes` (be sure to leave room on the upper part of the Form to display the `Label` dynamically created in the `CreateLabelControl()` method). In Figure 21-3, note that each label has an underlined letter that was identified using the & character in the value assigned to the `Text` property (as you might know, &-specified characters allow the user to activate an item using the Alt+<*some key*> keystroke).

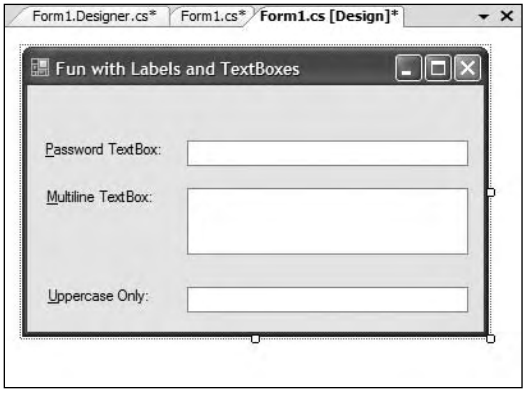


Figure 21-3. *Assigning mnemonics to* `Label` *controls*

If you now run your project, you will be able to tab between each `TextBox` using the Alt+p, Alt+m, or Alt+u keystrokes.

Fun with TextBoxes

Unlike the `Label` control, the `TextBox` control is typically not read-only (although it could be if you set the `ReadOnly` property to true), and it is commonly used to allow the user to enter textual data for processing. The `TextBox` type can be configured to hold a single line or multiple lines of text, it can be configured with a *password character* (such as an asterisk, *), and it may support scroll bars in the case of multiline text boxes. In addition to the behavior inherited by its base classes, `TextBox` defines a few particular properties of interest (see Table 21-2).

Table 21-2. `TextBox` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`AcceptsReturn`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether pressing Enter in a multiline `TextBox` control creates a new line of text in the control or activates the "default button" for the Form
`CharacterCasing`	Gets or sets whether the `TextBox` control modifies the case of characters as they are typed
`PasswordChar`	Gets or sets the character used to mask characters in a single-line `TextBox` control used to enter passwords
`ScrollBars`	Gets or sets which scroll bars should appear in a multiline `TextBox` control
`TextAlign`	Gets or sets how text is aligned in a `TextBox` control, using the `HorizontalAlignment` enumeration

To illustrate some aspects of the `TextBox`, let's configure the three `TextBox` controls on the current Form. The first `TextBox` (named `txtPassword`) should be configured as a password text box, meaning the characters typed into the `TextBox` should not be directly visible, but are instead masked with a predefined password character via the `PasswordChar` property.

The second `TextBox` (named `txtMultiline`) will be a multiline text area that has been configured to accept return key processing and displays a vertical scroll bar when the text entered exceeds the space of the `TextBox` area. Finally, the third `TextBox` (named `txtUppercase`) will be configured to translate the entered character data into uppercase.

Configure each `TextBox` accordingly via the Properties window and use the following (partial) `InitializeComponent()` implementation as a guide:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // txtPassword
    //
    this.txtPassword.PasswordChar = '*';
...
    // txtMultiline
    //
    this.txtMultiline.Multiline = true;
    this.txtMultiline.ScrollBars = System.Windows.Forms.ScrollBars.Vertical;
...
    // txtUpperCase
    //
    this.txtUpperCase.CharacterCasing =
        System.Windows.Forms.CharacterCasing.Upper;
...
}
```

Notice that the `ScrollBars` property is assigned a value from the `ScrollBars` enumeration, which defines the following values:

```
public enum System.Windows.Forms.ScrollBars
{
    Both, Horizontal, None, Vertical
}
```

The `CharacterCasing` property works in conjunction with the `CharacterCasing` enum, which is defined as so:

```
public enum System.Windows.Forms.CharacterCasing
{
    Normal, Upper, Lower
}
```

Now assume you have placed a `Button` on the Form (named `btnDisplayData`) and added an event handler for the `Button`'s `Click` event. The implementation of this method simply displays the value in each `TextBox` within a message box:

```
private void btnDisplayData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Get data from all the text boxes.
    string textBoxData = "";
    textBoxData += string.Format("MultiLine:  {0}\n", txtMultiline.Text);
    textBoxData += string.Format("\nPassword:  {0}\n", txtPassword.Text);
    textBoxData += string.Format("\nUppercase:  {0}\n", txtUpperCase.Text);

    // Display all the data.
    MessageBox.Show(textBoxData, "Here is the data in your TextBoxes");
}
```

Figure 21-4 shows one possible input session (note that you need to hold down the Alt key to see the label mnemonics).

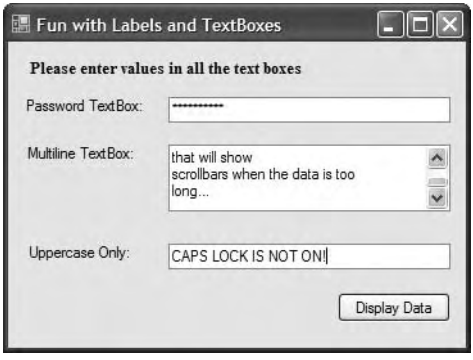


Figure 21-4. *The many faces of the* `TextBox` *type*

Figure 21-5 shows the result of clicking the `Button` type.



Figure 21-5. *Extracting values from* `TextBox` *types*

Fun with MaskedTextBoxes

As of .NET 2.0, we now have a *masked* text box that allows us to specify a valid sequence of characters that will be accepted by the input area (Social Security number, phone number with area code, zip code, or whatnot). The mask to test against (termed a *mask expression*) is established using specific tokens embedded into a string literal. Once you have created a mask expression, this value is assigned to the `Mask` property. Table 21-3 documents some (but not all) valid masking tokens.

Table 21-3. *Mask Tokens of* `MaskedTextBox`

Mask Token	Meaning in Life
`0`	Represents a mandatory digit with the value 0–9
`9`	Represents an optional digit or a space
`L`	Required letter (in uppercase or lowercase), A–Z
`?`	Optional letter (in uppercase or lowercase), A–Z
`,`	Represents a thousands separator placeholder
`:`	Represents a time placeholder
`/`	Represents a date placeholder
`$`	Represents a currency symbol

■ **Note** The characters understood by the `MaskedTextBox` *do not* directly map to the syntax of regular expressions. Although .NET provides namespaces to work with proper regular expressions (`System.Text.RegularExpressions` and `System.Web.RegularExpressions`), the `MaskedTextBox` uses syntax based on the legacy `MaskedEdit` VB6 COM control.

In addition to the `Mask` property, the `MaskedTextBox` has additional members that determine how this control should respond if the user enters incorrect data. For example, `BeepOnError` will cause the control to (obviously) issue a beep when the mask is not honored, and it prevents the illegal character from being processed.

To illustrate the use of the `MaskedTextBox`, add an additional `Label` and `MaskedTextBox` to your current Form. Although you are free to build a mask pattern directly in code, the Properties window provides an ellipsis button for the `Mask` property that will launch a dialog box with a number of predefined masks (see Figure 21-6).

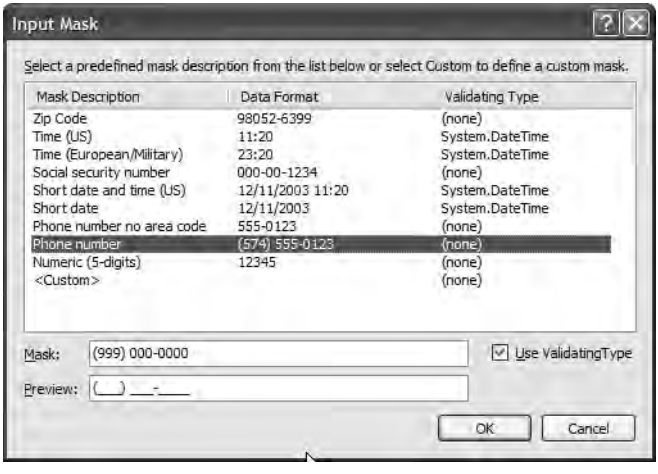


Figure 21-6. *Predefined mask values of the* `Mask` *property*

Find a masking pattern (such as Phone number), enable the `BeepOnError` property, and take your program out for another test run. You should find that you are unable to enter any alphabetic characters (in the case of the Phone number mask).

As you would expect, the `MaskedTextBox` will send out various events during its lifetime, one of which is `MaskInputRejected`, which is fired when the end user enters erroneous input. Handle this event using the Properties window and notice that the second incoming argument of the generated event handler is of type `MaskInputRejectedEventArgs`. This type has a property named `RejectionHint` that contains a brief description of the input error. For testing purposes, simply display the error on the Form's caption.

```
private void txtMaskedTextBox_MaskInputRejected(object sender,
    MaskInputRejectedEventArgs e)
{
    this.Text = string.Format("Error: {0}", e.RejectionHint);
}
```

To ensure that this error is not displayed when the user enters valid data, handle the KeyDown event on the MaskedTextBox and implement the event handler to reset the Form's caption to a default value:

```
private void txtMaskedTextBox_KeyDown(object sender, KeyEventArgs e)
{
    this.Text = "Fun with Labels and TextBoxes";
}
```

■ **Source Code** The LabelsAndTextBoxes project is included under the Chapter 21 subdirectory.

Fun with Buttons

The role of the System.Windows.Forms.Button type is to provide a vehicle for user confirmation, typically in response to a mouse click or keypress. The Button class immediately derives from an abstract type named ButtonBase, which provides a number of key behaviors for all derived types (such as CheckBox, RadioButton, and Button). Table 21-4 describes some (but by no means all) of the core properties of ButtonBase.

Table 21-4. ButtonBase *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
FlatStyle	Gets or sets the flat style appearance of the Button control, using members of the FlatStyle enumeration.
Image	Configures which (optional) image is displayed somewhere within the bounds of a ButtonBase-derived type. Recall that the Control class also defines a BackgroundImage property, which is used to render an image over the entire surface area of a widget.
ImageAlign	Sets the alignment of the image on the Button control, using the ContentAlignment enumeration.
TextAlign	Gets or sets the alignment of the text on the Button control, using the ContentAlignment enumeration.

The TextAlign property of ButtonBase makes it extremely simple to position text at just about any location. To set the position of your Button's caption, use the ContentAlignment enumeration (defined in the System.Drawing namespace). As you will see, this same enumeration can be used to place an optional image on the Button type:

```
public enum System.Drawing.ContentAlignment
{
    BottomCenter, BottomLeft, BottomRight,
    MiddleCenter, MiddleLeft, MiddleRight,
    TopCenter, TopLeft, TopRight
}
```

FlatStyle is another property of interest. It is used to control the general look and feel of the Button control, and it can be assigned any value from the FlatStyle enumeration (defined in the System.Windows.Forms namespace):

```
public enum System.Windows.Forms.FlatStyle
{
    Flat, Popup, Standard, System
}
```

To illustrate working with the `Button` type, create a new Windows Forms application named `Buttons`. On the Forms designer, add three `Button` types (named `btnFlat`, `btnPopup`, and `btnStandard`) and set each `Button`'s `FlatStyle` property value accordingly (e.g., `FlatStyle.Flat`, `FlatStyle.Popup`, or `FlatStyle.Standard`). As well, set the `Text` value of each `Button` to a fitting value and handle the `Click` event for the `btnStandard` `Button`. As you will see in just a moment, when the user clicks this button, you will reposition the button's text using the `TextAlign` property.

Now, add a final fourth `Button` (named `btnImage`) that supports a background image (set via the `BackgroundImage` property) and a small bull's-eye icon (set via the `Image` property), which will also be dynamically relocated when the `btnStandard` `Button` is clicked. Feel free to use any image files to assign to the `BackgroundImage` and `Image` properties, but do note that the downloadable source code contains the images used here.

Given that the designer has authored all the necessary UI prep code within `InitializeComponent()`, the remaining code makes use of the `ContentAlignment` enumeration to reposition the location of the text on `btnStandard` and the icon on `btnImage`. In the following code, notice that you are calling the static `Enum.GetValues()` method to obtain the list of names from the `ContentAlignment` enumeration:

```
partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    // Used to hold the current text alignment value.
    ContentAlignment currAlignment = ContentAlignment.MiddleCenter;
    int currEnumPos = 0;

    public MainWindow()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
        CenterToScreen();
    }

    private void btnStandard_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Get all possible values of the ContentAlignment enum.
        Array values = Enum.GetValues(currAlignment.GetType());

        // Bump the current position in the enum.
        // and check for wraparound.
        currEnumPos++;
        if(currEnumPos >= values.Length)
            currEnumPos = 0;

        // Bump the current enum value.
        currAlignment = (ContentAlignment)Enum.Parse(currAlignment.GetType(),
            values.GetValue(currEnumPos).ToString());

        // Paint enum value and align text on btnStandard.
        btnStandard.TextAlign = currAlignment;
            btnStandard.Text = currAlignment.ToString();

        // Now assign the location of the icon on btnImage
        btnImage.ImageAlign = currAlignment;
    }
}
```

Now run your program. As you click the middle button, you will see its text is set to the current name and position of the `currAlignment` member variable. As well, the icon within the `btnImage` is repositioned based on the same value. Figure 21-7 shows the output.



Figure 21-7. *The many faces of the* `Button` *type*

■ **Source Code** The Buttons project is included under the Chapter 21 directory.

Fun with CheckBoxes, RadioButtons, and GroupBoxes

The `System.Windows.Forms` namespace defines a number of other types that extend `ButtonBase`, specifically `CheckBox` (which can support up to three possible states) and `RadioButton` (which can be either selected or not selected). Like the `Button`, these types also receive most of their functionality from the `Control` base class. However, each class defines some additional functionality. First, consider the core properties of the `CheckBox` widget described in Table 21-5.

Table 21-5. `CheckBox` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Appearance`	Configures the appearance of a `CheckBox` control, using the `Appearance` enumeration.
`AutoCheck`	Gets or sets a value indicating if the `Checked` or `CheckState` value and the `CheckBox`'s appearance are automatically changed when it is clicked.
`CheckAlign`	Gets or sets the horizontal and vertical alignment of a `CheckBox` on a `CheckBox` control, using the `ContentAlignment` enumeration (much like the `Button` type).
`Checked`	Returns a Boolean value representing the state of the `CheckBox` (checked or unchecked). If the `ThreeState` property is set to true, the `Checked` property returns true for either checked or indeterminately checked values.
`CheckState`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the `CheckBox` is checked, using a `CheckState` enumeration rather than a Boolean value.
`ThreeState`	Configures whether the `CheckBox` supports three states of selection (as specified by the `CheckState` enumeration) rather than two.

The `RadioButton` type requires little comment, given that it is (more or less) just a slightly redesigned `CheckBox`. In fact, the members of a `RadioButton` are almost identical to those of the `CheckBox` type. The only notable difference is the `CheckedChanged` event, which (not surprisingly) is fired when the `Checked` value changes. Also, the `RadioButton` type does not support the `ThreeState` property, as a `RadioButton` must be on or off.

Typically, multiple `RadioButton` objects are logically and physically grouped together to function as a whole. For example, if you have a set of four `RadioButton` types representing the color choice of a given automobile, you may wish to ensure that only one of the four types can be checked at a time. Rather than writing code programmatically to do so, simply use the `GroupBox` control to ensure all `RadioButtons` are mutually exclusive.

To illustrate working with the `CheckBox`, `RadioButton`, and `GroupBox` types, let's create a new Windows Forms application named CarConfig, which you will extend over the next few sections. The main Form allows users to enter (and confirm) information about a new vehicle they intend to purchase. The order summary is displayed in a `Label` type once the Confirm Order button has been clicked. Figure 21-8 shows the initial UI.

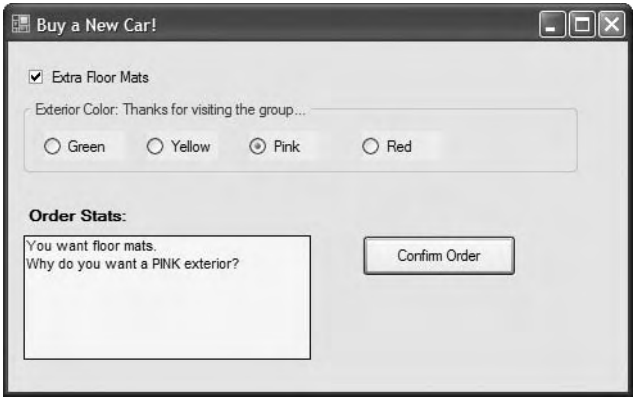


Figure 21-8. *The initial UI of the CarConfig Form*

Assuming you have leveraged the Forms designer to build your UI, you will now have numerous member variables representing each GUI widget. As well, the `InitializeComponent()` method will be updated accordingly. The first point of interest is the construction of the `CheckBox` type. As with any `Control`-derived type, once the look and feel has been established, it must be inserted into the Form's internal collection of controls:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // checkFloorMats
    //
    this.checkFloorMats.Name = "checkFloorMats";
    this.checkFloorMats.TabIndex = 0;
    this.checkFloorMats.Text = "Extra Floor Mats";
...
    this.Controls.Add(this.checkFloorMats);
}
```

Next, you have the configuration of the `GroupBox` and its contained `RadioButton` types. When you wish to place a control under the ownership of a `GroupBox`, you want to add each item to the `GroupBox`'s `Controls` collection (in the same way you add widgets to the Form's `Controls` collection). To make things a bit more interesting, use the Properties window to handle the `Enter` and `Leave` events sent by the `GroupBox` object, as shown here:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // radioRed
    //
    this.radioRed.Name = "radioRed";
    this.radioRed.Size = new System.Drawing.Size(64, 23);
    this.radioRed.Text = "Red";
    //
    // groupBoxColor
    //
...
    this.groupBoxColor.Controls.Add(this.radioRed);
    this.groupBoxColor.Text = "Exterior Color";
    this.groupBoxColor.Enter += new System.EventHandler(this.groupBoxColor_Enter);
    this.groupBoxColor.Leave += new System.EventHandler(this.groupBoxColor_Leave);
...
}
```

Understand, of course, that you do not need to capture the `Enter` or `Leave` event for a `GroupBox`. However, to illustrate, the event handlers update the caption text of the `GroupBox` as shown here:

```
// Figure out when the focus is in your group.
private void groupBoxColor_Leave(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    groupBoxColor.Text = "Exterior Color: Thanks for visiting the group...";
}

private void groupBoxColor_Enter(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    groupBoxColor.Text = "Exterior Color: You are in the group...";
}
```

The final GUI widgets on this Form (the `Label` and `Button` types) will also be configured and inserted in the Form's `Controls` collection via `InitializeComponent()`. The `Label` is used to display the order confirmation, which is formatted in the `Click` event handler of the order `Button`, as shown here:

```
private void btnOrder_Click (object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
     // Build a string to display information.
     string orderInfo = "";
     if(checkFloorMats.Checked)
          orderInfo += "You want floor mats.\n";
     if(radioRed.Checked)
          orderInfo += "You want a red exterior.\n";
     if(radioYellow.Checked)
          orderInfo += "You want a yellow exterior.\n";
     if(radioGreen.Checked)
          orderInfo += "You want a green exterior.\n";
     if(radioPink.Checked)
          orderInfo += "Why do you want a PINK exterior?\n";
     // Send this string to the Label.
     infoLabel.Text = orderInfo;
}
```

Notice that both the `CheckBox` and `RadioButton` support the `Checked` property, which allows you to investigate the state of the widget. Finally, recall that if you have configured a tri-state `CheckBox`, you will need to check the state of the widget using the `CheckState` property.

Fun with CheckedListBoxes

Now that you have explored the basic `Button`-centric widgets, let's move on to the set of list selection–centric types, specifically `CheckedListBox`, `ListBox`, and `ComboBox`. The `CheckedListBox` widget allows you to group related `CheckBox` options in a scrollable list control. Assume you have added such a control to your CarConfig Form that allows users to configure a number of options regarding an automobile's sound system (see Figure 21-9).



Figure 21-9. *The* `CheckedListBox` *type*

To insert new items in a `CheckedListBox`, call `Add()` for each item, or use the `AddRange()` method and send in an array of objects (strings, to be exact) that represent the full set of checkable items. Be aware that you can fill any of the list types at design time using the `Items` property located on the Properties window (just click the ellipsis button and type the string values). Here is the relevant code within `InitializeComponent()` that configures the `CheckedListBox`:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // checkedBoxRadioOptions
    //
    this.checkedBoxRadioOptions.Items.AddRange(new object[] {
        "Front Speakers", "8-Track Tape Player",
        "CD Player", "Cassette Player",
        "Rear Speakers", "Ultra Base Thumper"});
...
    this.Controls.Add (this.checkedBoxRadioOptions);
}
```

Now update the logic behind the `Click` event for the Confirm Order button. Ask the `CheckedListBox` which of its items are currently selected and add them to the `orderInfo` string. Here are the relevant code updates:

```
private void btnOrder_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
```

```
    string orderInfo = "";
    ...
    orderInfo += "--------------------------------\n";

    // For each item in the CheckedListBox:
    for(int i = 0; i < checkedBoxRadioOptions.Items.Count; i++)
    {
        // Is the current item checked?
        if(checkedBoxRadioOptions.GetItemChecked(i))
        {
            // Get text of checked item and append to orderinfo string.
            orderInfo += "Radio Item: ";
            orderInfo += checkedBoxRadioOptions.Items[i].ToString();
            orderInfo += "\n";
        }
    }
    ...
}
```

The final note regarding the `CheckedListBox` type is that it supports the use of multiple columns through the inherited `MultiColumn` property. Thus, if you make the following update:

```
checkedBoxRadioOptions.MultiColumn = true;
```

you see the multicolumn `CheckedListBox` shown in Figure 21-10.



Figure 21-10. *Multicolumn* `CheckedListBox` *type*

Fun with ListBoxes

As mentioned earlier, the `CheckedListBox` type inherits most of its functionality from the `ListBox` type. To illustrate using the `ListBox` type, let's add another feature to the current CarConfig application: the ability to select the make (BMW, Yugo, etc.) of the automobile. Figure 21-11 shows the desired UI.



Figure 21-11. *The* `ListBox` *type*

As always, begin by creating a member variable to manipulate your type (in this case, a `ListBox` type). Next, configure the look and feel using the following snapshot from `InitializeComponent()`:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // carMakeList
    //
    this.carMakeList.Items.AddRange(new object[] {
        "BMW", "Caravan", "Ford", "Grand Am",
        "Jeep", "Jetta", "Saab", "Viper", "Yugo"});
...
    this.Controls.Add (this.carMakeList);
}
```

The update to the `btnOrder_Click()` event handler is also simple:

```
private void btnOrder_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Build a string to display information.
     string orderInfo = "";
     ...
     // Get the currently selected item (not index of the item).
     if(carMakeList.SelectedItem != null)
          orderInfo += "Make: " + carMakeList.SelectedItem + "\n";
     ...
}
```

Fun with ComboBoxes

Like a `ListBox`, a `ComboBox` allows users to make a selection from a well-defined set of possibilities. However, the `ComboBox` type is unique in that users can also insert additional items. Recall that `ComboBox` derives from `ListBox` (which then derives from `Control`). To illustrate its use, add yet another GUI

widget to the CarConfig Form that allows a user to enter the name of a preferred salesperson. If the salesperson in question is not on the list, the user can enter a custom name. One possible UI update is shown in Figure 21-12 (feel free to add your own salesperson monikers).



Figure 21-12. *The* `ComboBox` *type*

This modification begins with configuring the `ComboBox` itself. As you can see here, the logic looks identical to that for the `ListBox`:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // comboSalesPerson
    //
    this.comboSalesPerson.Items.AddRange(new object[] {
        "Baby Ry-Ry", "Dan \'the Machine\'",
        "Danny Boy", "Tommy Boy"});
...
    this.Controls.Add (this.comboSalesPerson);
}
```

The update to the `btnOrder_Click()` event handler is again simple, as shown here:

```
private void btnOrder_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Build a string to display information.
     string orderInfo = "";
     ...
     // Use the Text property to figure out the user's salesperson.
     if(comboSalesPerson.Text != "")
          orderInfo += "Sales Person: " + comboSalesPerson.Text + "\n";
     else
          orderInfo += "You did not select a sales person!" + "\n";
     ...
}
```

Configuring the Tab Order

Now that you have created a somewhat interesting Form, let's formalize the issue of tab order. As you may know, when a Form contains multiple GUI widgets, users expect to be able to shift focus using the Tab key. Configuring the tab order for your set of controls requires that you understand two key properties: `TabStop` and `TabIndex`.

The `TabStop` property can be set to `true` or `false`, based on whether or not you wish this GUI item to be reachable using the Tab key. Assuming the `TabStop` property has been set to true for a given widget, the `TabOrder` property is then set to establish its order of activation in the tabbing sequence (which is zero based). Consider this example:

```
// Configure tabbing properties.
radioRed.TabIndex = 2;
radioRed.TabStop = true;
```

The Tab Order Wizard

The Visual Studio 2005 IDE supplies a Tab Order Wizard, which you access by choosing View ➤ Tab Order (be aware that you will not find this menu option unless the Forms designer is active). Once activated, your design-time Form displays the current `TabIndex` value for each widget. To change these values, click each item in the order you choose (see Figure 21-13).

To exit the Tab Order Wizard, simply press the Esc key.



Figure 21-13. *The Tab Order Wizard*

Setting the Form's Default Input Button

Many user-input forms (especially dialog boxes) have a particular `Button` that will automatically respond to the user pressing the Enter key. For the current Form, if you wish to ensure that when the user presses the Enter key, the `Click` event handler for `btnOrder` is invoked, simply set the Form's `AcceptButton` property as so:

```
// When the Enter key is pressed, it is as if
// the user clicked the btnOrder button.
this.AcceptButton = btnOrder;
```

■ **Note** Some Forms require the ability to simulate clicking the Form's Cancel button when the user presses the Esc key. This can be done by assigning the `CancelButton` property to the `Button` object representing the Cancel button.

Working with More Exotic Controls

At this point, you have seen how to work most of the basic Windows Forms controls (`Labels`, `TextBoxes`, and the like). The next task is to examine some GUI widgets, which are a bit more high-powered in their functionality. Thankfully, just because a control may seem "more exotic" does not mean it is hard to work with, only that it requires a bit more elaboration from the outset. Over the next several pages, we will examine the following GUI elements:

- `MonthCalendar`
- `ToolTip`
- `TabControl`
- `TrackBar`
- `Panel`
- `UpDown` controls
- `ErrorProvider`
- `TreeView`
- `WebBrower`

To begin, let's wrap up the CarConfig project by examining the `MonthCalendar` and `ToolTip` controls.

Fun with MonthCalendars

The `System.Windows.Forms` namespace provides an extremely useful widget, the `MonthCalendar` control, that allows the user to select a date (or range of dates) using a friendly UI. To showcase this new control, update the existing CarConfig application to allow the user to enter in the new vehicle's delivery date. Figure 21-14 shows the updated (and slightly rearranged) Form.



Figure 21-14. *The* `MonthCalendar` *type*

Although the `MonthCalendar` control offers a fair bit of functionality, it is very simple to programmatically capture the range of dates selected by the user. The default behavior of this type is to always select (and mark) today's date automatically. To obtain the currently selected date programmatically, you can update the `Click` event handler for the order `Button`, as shown here:

```
private void btnOrder_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Build a string to display information.
    string orderInfo = "";
    ...
    // Get ship date.
    DateTime d = monthCalendar.SelectionStart;
    string dateStr = string.Format("{0}/{1}/{2}", d.Month, d.Day, d.Year);
    orderInfo += "Car will be sent: " + dateStr;
    ...
}
```

Notice that you can ask the `MonthCalendar` control for the currently selected date by using the `SelectionStart` property. This property returns a `DateTime` reference, which you store in a local variable. Using a handful of properties of the `DateTime` type, you can extract the information you need in a custom format.

At this point, I assume the user will specify exactly one day on which to deliver the new automobile. However, what if you want to allow the user to select a range of possible shipping dates? In that case, all the user needs to do is drag the cursor across the range of possible shipping dates. You already have seen that you can obtain the start of the selection using the `SelectionStart` property. The end of the selection can be determined using the `SelectionEnd` property. Here is the code update:

```
private void btnOrder_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Build a string to display information.
     string orderInfo = "";
     ...
     // Get ship date range....
     DateTime startD = monthCalendar.SelectionStart;
     DateTime endD = monthCalendar.SelectionEnd;
     string dateStartStr =
         string.Format("{0}/{1}/{2}", startD.Month, startD.Day, startD.Year);
     string dateEndStr =
        string.Format("{0}/{1}/{2}", endD.Month, endD.Day, endD.Year);

     // The DateTime type supports overloaded operators!
     if(dateStartStr != dateEndStr)
     {
          orderInfo += "Car will be sent between "
          + dateStartStr + " and\ n" + dateEndStr;
     }
     else   // They picked a single date.
          orderInfo += "Car will be sent on "  + dateStartStr;
     ...
}
```

■ **Note** The Windows Forms toolkit also provides the `DateTimePicker` control, which exposes a `MonthCalendar` from a `DropDown` control.

Fun with ToolTips

As far as the CarConfig Form is concerned, we have one final point of interest. Most modern UIs support *tool tips*. In the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace, the `ToolTip` type represents this functionality. These widgets are simply small floating windows that display a helpful message when the cursor hovers over a given item.

To illustrate, add a tool tip to the CarConfig's `Calendar` type. Begin by dragging a new `ToolTip` control from the Toolbox onto your Forms designer, and rename it to `calendarTip`. Using the Properties window, you are able to establish the overall look and feel of the `ToolTip` widget, for example:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // calendarTip
    //
    this.calendarTip.IsBalloon = true;
    this.calendarTip.ShowAlways = true;
    this.calendarTip.ToolTipIcon = System.Windows.Forms.ToolTipIcon.Info;
...
}
```

To associate a `ToolTip` with a given control, select the control that should activate the `ToolTip` and set the "ToolTip on" property (see Figure 21-15).

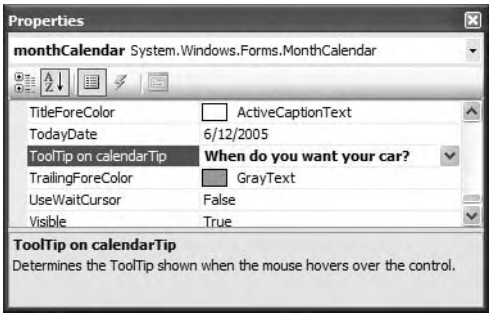


Figure 21-15. *Associating a* `ToolTip` *to a given widget*

At this point, the CarConfig project is complete. Figure 21-16 shows the `ToolTip` in action.

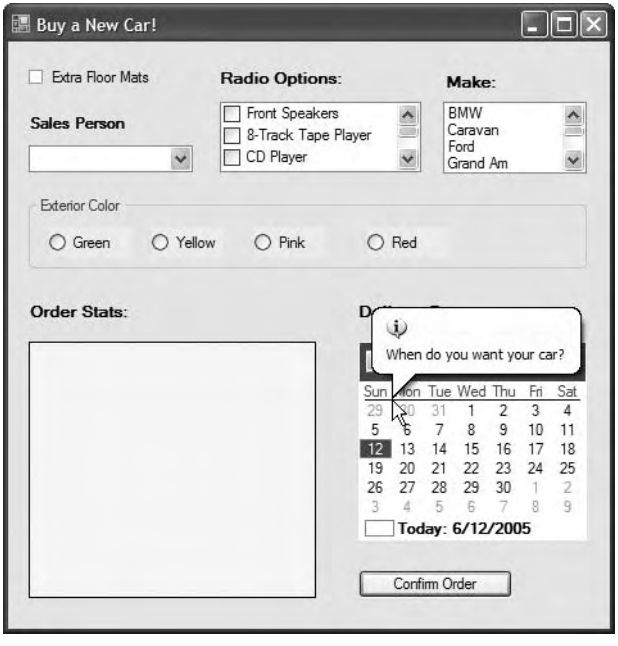


Figure 21-16. *The* `ToolTip` *in action*

■ **Source Code** The CarConfig project is included under the Chapter 21 directory.

Fun with TabControls

To illustrate the remaining "exotic" controls, you will build a new Form that maintains a `TabControl`. As you may know, `TabControls` allow you to selectively hide or show pages of related GUI content via clicking a given tab. To begin, create a new Windows Forms application named `ExoticControls` and rename your initial Form to `MainWindow`.

Next, add a `TabControl` onto the Forms designer and, using the Properties window, open the page editor via the `TabPages` collection (just click the ellipsis button on the Properties window). A dialog configuration tool displays. Add a total of six pages, setting each page's `Text` and `Name` properties based on the completed `TabControl` shown in Figure 21-17.

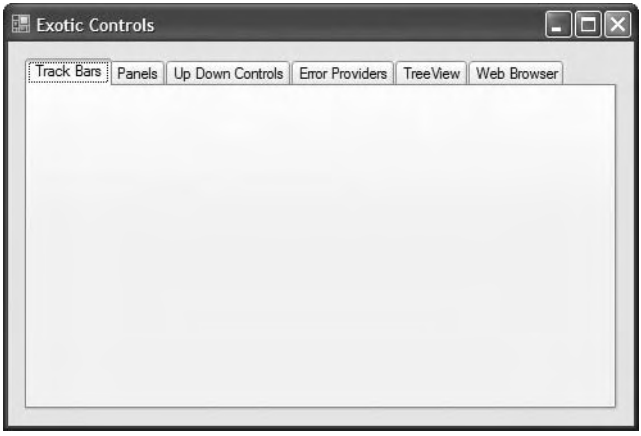


Figure 21-17. *A multipage* `TabControl`

As you are designing your `TabControl`, be aware that each page is represented by a `TabPage` object, which is inserted into the `TabControl`'s internal collection of pages. Once the `TabControl` has been configured, this object (like any other GUI widget within a Form) is inserted into the Form's `Controls` collection. Consider the following partial `InitializeComponent()` method:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    // tabControlExoticControls
    //
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Controls.Add(this.pageTrackBars);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Controls.Add(this.pagePanels);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Controls.Add(this.pageUpDown);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Controls.Add(this.pageErrorProvider);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Controls.Add(this.pageTreeView);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Controls.Add(this.pageWebBrowser);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Location = new System.Drawing.Point(13, 13);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Name = "tabControlExoticControls";
    this.tabControlExoticControls.SelectedIndex = 0;
    this.tabControlExoticControls.Size = new System.Drawing.Size(463, 274);
    this.tabControlExoticControls.TabIndex = 0;
...
    this.Controls.Add(this.tabControlExoticControls);
}
```

Now that you have a basic Form supporting multiple tabs, you can build each page to illustrate the remaining exotic controls. First up, let's check out the role of the `TrackBar`.

■ **Note** The `TabControl` widget supports `Selected`, `Selecting`, `Deselected`, and `Deselecting` events. These can prove helpful when you need to dynamically generate the elements within a given page.

Fun with TrackBars

The `TrackBar` control allows users to select from a range of values, using a scroll bar–like input mechanism. When working with this type, you need to set the minimum and maximum range, the minimum and maximum change increments, and the starting location of the slider's thumb. Each of these aspects can be set using the properties described in Table 21-6.

Table 21-6. `TrackBar` *Properties*

Properties	Meaning in Life
`LargeChange`	The number of ticks by which the `TrackBar` changes when an event considered a large change occurs (e.g., clicking the mouse button while the cursor is on the sliding range and using the Page Up or Page Down key).
`Maximum` `Minimum`	Configure the upper and lower bounds of the `TrackBar`'s range.
`Orientation`	The orientation for this `TrackBar`. Valid values are from the `Orientation` enumeration (i.e., horizontally or vertically).
`SmallChange`	The number of ticks by which the `TrackBar` changes when an event considered a small change occurs (e.g., using the arrow keys).
`TickFrequency`	Indicates how many ticks are drawn. For a `TrackBar` with an upper limit of 200, it is impractical to draw all 200 ticks on a control 2 inches long. If you set the `TickFrequency` property to 5, the `TrackBar` draws 20 total ticks (each tick represents 5 units).
`TickStyle`	Indicates how the `TrackBar` control draws itself. This affects both where the ticks are drawn in relation to the movable thumb and how the thumb itself is drawn (using the `TickStyle` enumeration).
`Value`	Gets or sets the current location of the `TrackBar`. Use this property to obtain the numeric value contained by the `TrackBar` for use in your application.

To illustrate, you'll update the first tab of your `TabControl` with three `TrackBar`s, each of which has an upper range of 255 and a lower range of 0. As the user slides each thumb, the application intercepts the `Scroll` event and dynamically builds a new `System.Drawing.Color` type based on the value of each slider. This `Color` type will be used to display the color within a `PictureBox` widget (named `colorBox`) and the RGB values within a `Label` type (named `lblCurrColor`). Figure 21-18 shows the (completed) first page in action.

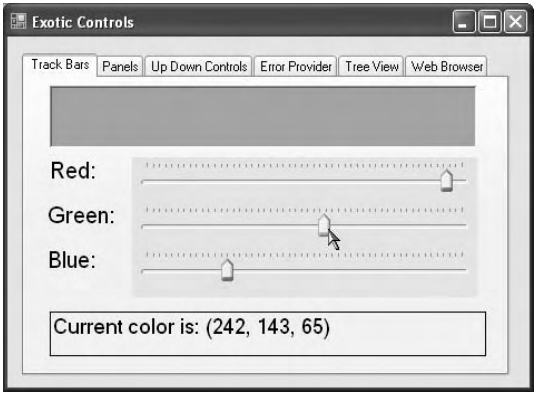


Figure 21-18. *The* `TrackBar` *page*

First, place three TrackBars onto the first tab using the Forms designer and rename your member variables with an appropriate value (redTrackBar, greenTrackBar, and blueTrackBar). Next, handle the Scroll event for each of your TrackBar controls. Here is the relevant code within InitializeComponent() for blueTrackBar (the remaining bars look almost identical, with the exception of the name of the Scroll event handler):

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    //
    // blueTrackBar
    //
    this.blueTrackBar.Maximum = 255;
    this.blueTrackBar.Name = "blueTrackBar";
    this.blueTrackBar.TickFrequency = 5;
    this.blueTrackBar.TickStyle = System.Windows.Forms.TickStyle.TopLeft;
    this.blueTrackBar.Scroll += new System.EventHandler(this.blueTrackBar_Scroll);
...
}
```

Note that the default minimum value of the TrackBar is 0 and thus does not need to be explicitly set. In the Scroll event handlers for each TrackBar, you make a call to a yet-to-be-written helper function named UpdateColor():

```
private void blueTrackBar_Scroll (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     UpdateColor();
}
```

UpdateColor() is responsible for two major tasks. First, you read the current value of each TrackBar and use this data to build a new Color variable using Color.FromArgb(). Once you have the newly configured color, update the PictureBox member variable (again, named colorBox) with the current background color. Finally, UpdateColor() formats the thumb values in a string placed on the Label (lblCurrColor), as shown here:

```
private void UpdateColor()
{
     // Get the new color based on track bars.
     Color c = Color.FromArgb(redTrackBar.Value,
          greenTrackBar.Value, blueTrackBar.Value);
     // Change the color in the PictureBox.
     colorBox.BackColor = c;
     // Set color label.
     lblCurrColor.Text =
          string.Format("Current color is: (R:{0}, G:{1}, B:{2})",
          redTrackBar.Value, greenTrackBar.Value,
          blueTrackBar.Value);
}
```

The final detail is to set the initial values of each slider when the Form comes to life and render the current color, as shown here:

```
public MainWindow()
{
     InitializeComponent();
     CenterToScreen();
     // Set initial position of each slider.
     redTrackBar.Value = 100;
     greenTrackBar.Value = 255;
```

```
    blueTrackBar.Value = 0;
    UpdateColor();
}
```

Fun with Panels

As you saw earlier in this chapter, the `GroupBox` control can be used to logically bind a number of controls (such as `RadioButtons`) to function as a collective. Closely related to the `GroupBox` is the `Panel` control. `Panels` are also used to group related controls in a logical unit. One difference is that the `Panel` type derives from the `ScrollableControl` class, thus it can support scroll bars, which is not possible with a `GroupBox`.

`Panels` can also be used to conserve screen real estate. For example, if you have a group of controls that takes up the entire bottom half of a Form, you can contain the group in a `Panel` that is half the size and set the `AutoScroll` property to true. In this way, the user can use the scroll bar(s) to view the full set of items. Furthermore, if a `Panel`'s `BorderStyle` property is set to `None`, you can use this type to simply group a set of elements that can be easily shown or hidden from view in a manner transparent to the end user.

To illustrate, let's update the second page of the `TabControl` with two `Button` types (`btnShowPanel` and `btnHidePanel`) and a single `Panel` that contains a pair of text boxes (`txtNormalText` and `txtUpperText`) and an instructional `Label`. (Mind you, the widgets on the `Panel` are not terribly important for this example.) Figure 21-19 shows the final GUI.

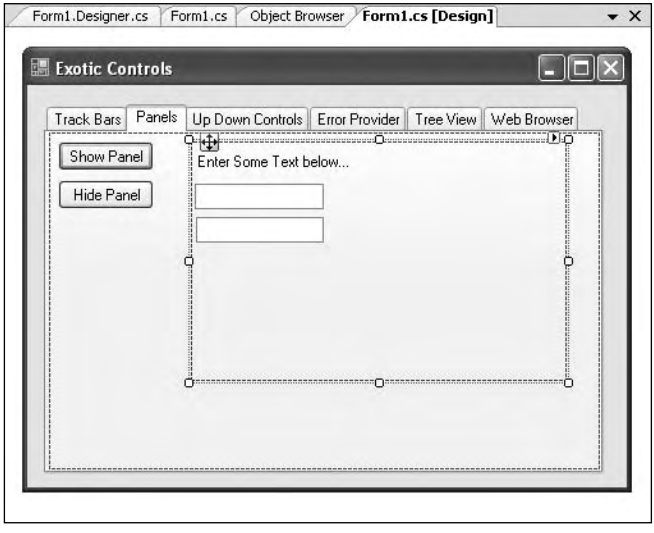


Figure 21-19. *The* `TrackBar` *page*

Using the Properties window, handle the `TextChanged` event for the first `TextBox`, and within the generated event handler, place an uppercase version of the text entered within `txtNormalText` into `txtUpperText`:

```
private void txtNormalText_TextChanged(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    txtUpperText.Text = txtNormalText.Text.ToUpper();
}
```

Now, handle the `Click` event for each button. As you might suspect, you will simply hide or show the `Panel` (and all of its contained UI elements):

```
private void btnShowPanel_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    panelTextBoxes.Visible = true;
}
private void btnHidePanel_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    panelTextBoxes.Visible = false;
}
```

If you now run your program and click either button, you will find that the `Panel`'s contents are shown and hidden accordingly. While this example is hardly fascinating, I am sure you can see the possibilities. For example, you may have a menu option (or security setting) that allows the user to see a "simple" or "complex" view. Rather than having to manually set the `Visible` property to false for multiple widgets, you can group them all within a `Panel` and set its `Visible` property accordingly.

Fun with the UpDown Controls

Windows Forms provide two widgets that function as *spin controls* (also known as *up/down controls*). Like the `ComboBox` and `ListBox` types, these new items also allow the user to choose an item from a range of possible selections. The difference is that when you're using a `DomainUpDown` or `NumericUpDown` control, the information is selected using a pair of small up and down arrows. For example, check out Figure 21-20.

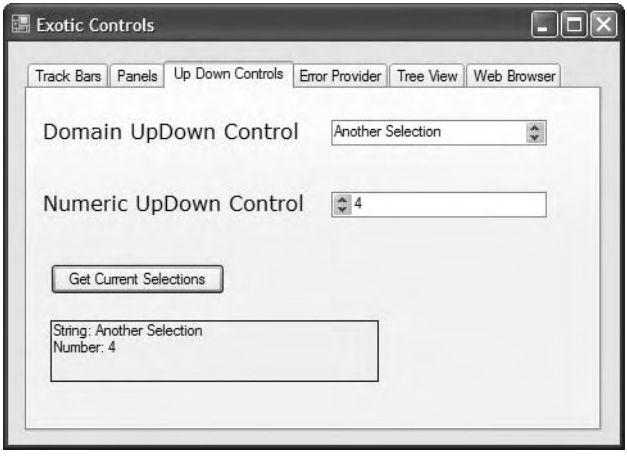


Figure 21-20. *Working with* `UpDown` *types*

Given your work with similar types, you should find working with the `UpDown` widgets painless. The `DomainUpDown` widget allows the user to select from a set of string data. `NumericUpDown` allows selections from a range of numeric data points. Each widget derives from a common direct base class, `UpDownBase`. Table 21-7 describes some important properties of this class.

Table 21-7. `UpDownBase` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`InterceptArrowKeys`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the user can use the up arrow and down arrow keys to select values
`ReadOnly`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the text can only be changed by the use of the up and down arrows and not by typing in the control to locate a given string
`Text`	Gets or sets the current text displayed in the spin control
`TextAlign`	Gets or sets the alignment of the text in the spin control
`UpDownAlign`	Gets or sets the alignment of the up and down arrows on the spin control, using the `LeftRightAlignment` enumeration

The `DomainUpDown` control adds a small set of properties (see Table 21-8) that allow you to configure and manipulate the textual data in the widget.

Table 21-8. `DomainUpDown` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Items`	Allows you to gain access to the set of items stored in the widget
`SelectedIndex`	Returns the zero-based index of the currently selected item (a value of –1 indicates no selection)
`SelectedItem`	Returns the selected item itself (not its index)
`Sorted`	Configures whether or not the strings should be alphabetized
`Wrap`	Controls if the collection of items continues to the first or last item if the user continues past the end of the list

The `NumericUpDown` type is just as simple (see Table 21-9).

Table 21-9. `NumericUpDown` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life

`DecimalPlaces`
`ThousandsSeparator`
`Hexadecimal`
	Used to configure how the numerical data is to be displayed.

`Increment`	Sets the numerical value to increment the value in the control when the up or down arrow is clicked. The default is to advance the value by 1.
`Minimum` `Maximum`	Sets the upper and lower limits of the value in the control.
`Value`	Returns the current value in the control.

Here is a partial `InitializeComponent()` that configures this page's `NumericUpDown` and `DomainUpDown` widgets:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    //
    // numericUpDown
    //
```

```
...
    this.numericUpDown.Maximum = new decimal(new int[] {
        5000, 0, 0, 0});
    this.numericUpDown.Name = "numericUpDown";
    this.numericUpDown.ThousandsSeparator = true;
    //
    // domainUpDown
    //
    this.domainUpDown.Items.Add("Another Selection");
    this.domainUpDown.Items.Add("Final Selection");
    this.domainUpDown.Items.Add("Selection One");
    this.domainUpDown.Items.Add("Third Selection");
    this.domainUpDown.Name = "domainUpDown";
    this.domainUpDown.Sorted = true;
...
}
```

The `Click` event handler for this page's `Button` type simply asks each type for its current value and places it in the appropriate `Label` (`lblCurrSel`) as a formatted string, as shown here:

```
private void btnGetSelections_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Get info from updowns...
     lblCurrSel.Text =
          string.Format("String: {0}\nNumber: {1}",
          domainUpDown.Text, numericUpDown.Value);
 }
```

Fun with ErrorProviders

Most Windows Forms applications will need to validate user input in one way or another. This is especially true with dialog boxes, as you should inform users if they make a processing error before continuing forward. The `ErrorProvider` type can be used to provide a visual cue of user input error. For example, assume you have a Form containing a `TextBox` and `Button` widget. If the user enters more than five characters in the `TextBox` and the `TextBox` loses focus, the error information shown in Figure 21-21 could be displayed.

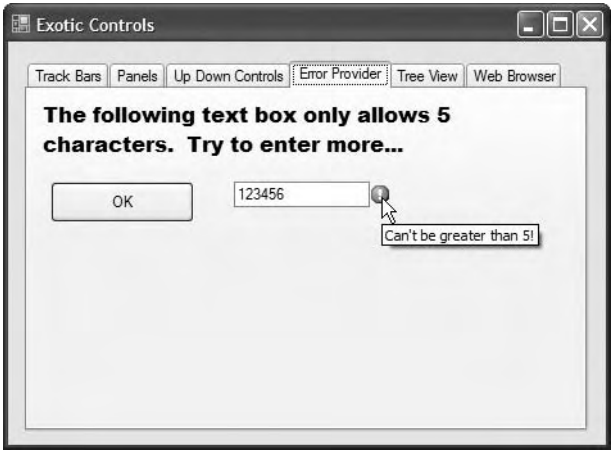


Figure 21-21. *The* `ErrorProvider` *in action*

Here, you have detected that the user entered more than five characters and responded by placing a small error icon (!) next to the `TextBox` object. When the user places his cursor over this icon, the descriptive error text appears as a pop-up. Also, this `ErrorProvider` is configured to cause the icon to blink a number of times to strengthen the visual cue (which, of course, you can't see without running the application).

If you wish to support this type of input validation, the first step is to understand the properties of the `Control` class shown in Table 21-10.

Table 21-10. `Control` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`CausesValidation`	Indicates whether selecting this control causes validation on the controls requiring validation
`Validated`	Occurs when the control is finished performing its validation logic
`Validating`	Occurs when the control is validating user input (e.g., when the control loses focus)

Every GUI widget can set the `CausesValidation` property to true or false (the default is true). If you set this bit of state data to true, the control forces the other controls on the Form to validate themselves when it receives focus. Once a validating control has received focus, the `Validating` and `Validated` events are fired for each control. In the scope of the `Validating` event handler, you configure a corresponding `ErrorProvider`. Optionally, the `Validated` event can be handled to determine when the control has finished its validation cycle.

The `ErrorProvider` type has a small set of members. The most important item for your purposes is the `BlinkStyle` property, which can be set t any of the values of the `ErrorBlinkStyle` enumeration described in Table 21-11.

Table 21-11. `ErrorBlinkStyle` *Properties*

Property	Meaning in Life
`AlwaysBlink`	Causes the error icon to blink when the error is first displayed or when a new error description string is set for the control and the error icon is already displayed
`BlinkIfDifferentError`	Causes the error icon to blink only if the error icon is already displayed, but a new error string is set for the control
`NeverBlink`	Indicates the error icon never blinks

To illustrate, update the UI of the Error Provider page with a `Button`, `TextBox`, and `Label` as shown in Figure 20-21. Next, drag an `ErrorProvider` widget named `tooManyCharactersErrorProvider` onto the designer. Here is the configuration code within `InitializeComponent()`:

```
private void InitializeComponent()
{
...
    //
    // tooManyCharactersErrorProvider
    //
    this.tooManyCharactersErrorProvider.BlinkRate = 500;
    this.tooManyCharactersErrorProvider.BlinkStyle =
        System.Windows.Forms.ErrorBlinkStyle.AlwaysBlink;
```

```
    this.tooManyCharactersErrorProvider.ContainerControl = this;
...
}
```

Once you have configured how the `ErrorProvider` looks and feels, you bind the error to the `TextBox` within the scope of its `Validating` event handler, as shown here:

```
private void txtInput_Validating (object sender, CancelEventArgs e)
{
     // Check if the text length is greater than 5.
     if(txtInput.Text.Length > 5)
     {
          errorProvider1.SetError( txtInput, "Can't be greater than 5!");
     }
     else // Things are OK, don't show anything.
          errorProvider1.SetError(txtInput, "");
}
```

Fun with TreeViews

`TreeView` controls are very helpful types in that they allow you to visually display hierarchical data (such as a directory structure or any other type of parent/child relationship). As you would expect, the Window Forms `TreeView` control can be highly customized. If you wish, you can add custom images, node colors, node subcontrols, and other visual enhancements. (I'll assume interested readers will consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details of this widget.)

To illustrate the basic use of the `TreeView`, the next page of your `TabControl` will programmatically construct a `TreeView` defining a series of topmost nodes that represent a set of `Car` types. Each Car node has two subnodes that represent the selected car's current speed and favorite radio station. In Figure 21-22, notice that the selected item will be highlighted. Also note that if the selected node has a parent (or sibling), its name is presented in a `Label` widget.

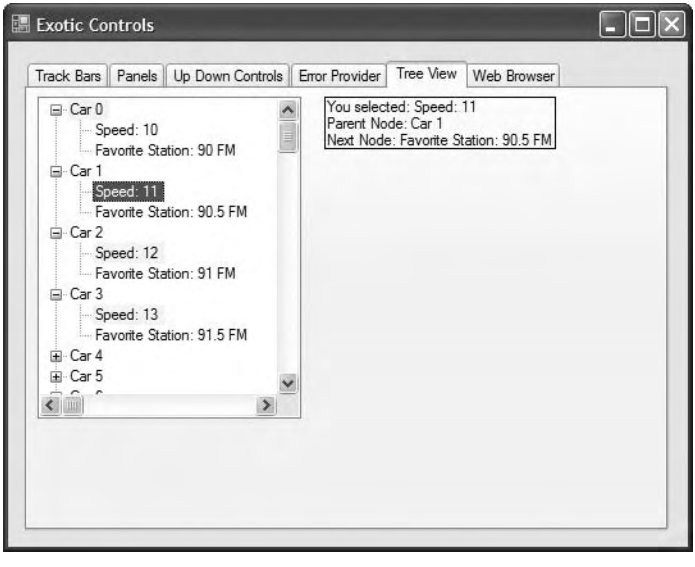


Figure 21-22. *The* `TreeView` *in action*

Assuming your Tree View UI is composed of a `TreeView` control (named `treeViewCars`) and a `Label` (named `lblNodeInfo`), insert a new C# file into your ExoticControls project that models a trivial `Car` that has-a `Radio`:

```
namespace ExoticControls
{
    class Car
    {
        public Car(string pn, int cs)
        {
            petName = pn;
            currSp = cs;
        }
        public string petName;
        public int currSp;
        public Radio r;
    }

    class Radio
    {
        public double favoriteStation;
        public Radio(double station)
        { favoriteStation = station; }
    }
}
```

The `Form`-derived type will maintain a generic `List<>` (named `listCars`) of 100 `Car` types, which will be populated in the default constructor of the `MainForm` type. As well, the constructor will call a new helper method named `BuildCarTreeView()`, which takes no arguments and returns `void`. Here is the initial update:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    // Create a new generic List to hold the Car objects.
    private List<Car> listCars = new List<Car>();

    public MainWindow()
    {
...
        // Fill List<> and build TreeView.
        double offset = 0.5;
        for (int x = 0; x < 100; x++)
        {
            listCars.Add(new Car(string.Format("Car {0}", x), 10 + x));
            offset += 0.5;
            listCars[x].r = new Radio(89.0 + offset);
        }
        BuildCarTreeView();
    }
    ...
}
```

Note that the `petName` of each car is based on the current value of `x` (Car 0, Car 1, Car 2, etc.). As well, the current speed is set by offsetting `x` by 10 (10 mph to 109 mph), while the favorite radio station is established by offsetting the value 89.0 by 0.5 (90, 90.5, 91, 91.5, etc.).

Now that you have a list of Cars, you need to map these values to nodes of the TreeView control. The most important aspect to understand when working with the TreeView widget is that each topmost node and subnode is represented by a System.Windows.Forms.TreeNode object, derived directly from MarshalByRefObject. Here are some of the interesting properties of TreeNode:

```
public class TreeNode : MarshalByRefObject,
  ICloneable, ISerializable
{
...
    public Color BackColor { get; set; }
    public bool Checked { get; set; }
    public virtual ContextMenu ContextMenu { get; set; }
    public virtual ContextMenuStrip ContextMenuStrip { get; set; }
    public Color ForeColor { get; set; }
    public int ImageIndex { get; set; }
    public bool IsExpanded { get; }
    public bool IsSelected { get; }
    public bool IsVisible { get; }
    public string Name { get; set; }
    public TreeNode NextNode { get; }
    public Font NodeFont { get; set; }
    public TreeNodeCollection Nodes { get; }
    public TreeNode PrevNode { get; }
    public string Text { get; set; }
    public string ToolTipText { get; set; }
...
}
```

As you can see, each node of a TreeView can be assigned images, colors, fonts, tool tips, and context menus. As well, the TreeNode provides members to navigate to the next (or previous) TreeNode. Given this, consider the initial implementation of BuildCarTreeView():

```
private void BuildCarTreeView()
{
    // Don't paint the TreeView until all the nodes have been created.
    treeViewCars.BeginUpdate();

    // Clear the TreeView of any current nodes.
    treeViewCars.Nodes.Clear();

    // Add a TreeNode for each Car object in the List<>.
    foreach (Car c in listCars)
    {
        // Add the current Car as a topmost node.
        treeViewCars.Nodes.Add(new TreeNode(c.petName));

        // Now, get the Car you just added to build
        // two subnodes based on the speed and
        // internal Radio object.
        treeViewCars.Nodes[listCars.IndexOf(c)].Nodes.Add(
            new TreeNode(string.Format("Speed: {0}",
            c.currSp.ToString())));
        treeViewCars.Nodes[listCars.IndexOf(c)].Nodes.Add(
            new TreeNode(string.Format("Favorite Station: {0} FM",
            c.r.favoriteStation)));
    }
```

```
    // Now paint the TreeView.
    treeViewCars.EndUpdate();
}
```

As you can see, the construction of the `TreeView` nodes are sandwiched between a call to `BeginUpdate()` and `EndUpdate()`. This can be helpful when you are populating a massive `TreeView` with a great many nodes, given that the widget will wait to display the items until you have finished filling the `Nodes` collection. In this way, the end user does not see the gradual rendering of the `TreeView`'s elements.

The topmost nodes are added to the `TreeView` simply by iterating over the generic `List<>` type and inserting a new `TreeNode` object into the `TreeView`'s `Nodes` collection. Once a topmost node has been added, you pluck it from the `Nodes` collection (via the type indexer) to add its subnodes (which are also represented by `TreeNode` objects). As you might guess, if you wish to add subnodes to a current subnode, simply populate its internal collection of nodes via the `Nodes` property.

The next task for this page of the `TabControl` is to highlight the currently selected node (via the `BackColor` property) and display the selected item (as well as any parent or subnodes) within the `Label` widget. All of this can be accomplished by handling the `TreeView` control's `AfterSelect` event via the Properties window. This event fires after the user has selected a node via a mouse click or keyboard navigation. Here is the complete implementation of the `AfterSelect` event handler:

```
private void treeViewCars_AfterSelect(object sender, TreeViewEventArgs e)
{
    string nodeInfo = "";

    // Build info about selected node.
    nodeInfo = string.Format("You selected: {0}\n", e.Node.Text);
    if (e.Node.Parent != null)
        nodeInfo += string.Format("Parent Node: {0}\n", e.Node.Parent.Text);
    if (e.Node.NextNode != null)
        nodeInfo += string.Format("Next Node: {0}", e.Node.NextNode.Text);

    // Show info and highlight node.
    lblNodeInfo.Text = nodeInfo;
    e.Node.BackColor = Color.AliceBlue;
}
```

The incoming `TreeViewEventArgs` object contains a property named `Node`, which returns a `TreeNode` object representing the current selection. From here, you are able to extract the node's name (via the `Text` property) as well as the parent and next node (via the `Parent/NextNode` properties). Note you are explicitly checking the `TreeNode` objects returned from `Parent/NextNode` for null, in case the user has selected the first topmost node or the very last subnode (if you did not do this, you might trigger a `NullReferenceException`).

Adding Node Images

To wrap up our examination of the `TreeView` type, let's spruce up the current example by defining three new `*.bmp` images that will be assigned to each node type. To do so, add a new `ImageList` component (named `imageListTreeView`) to the designer of the `MainForm` type. Next, add three new bitmap images to your project via the Project ➤ Add New Item menu selection (or make use of the supplied `*.bmp` files within this book's downloadable code) that represent (or at least closely approximate) a car, radio, and "speed" image. Do note that each of these `*.bmp` files is 16×16 pixels (set via the Properties window) so that they have a decent appearance within the `TreeView`.

Once you have created these image files, select the `ImageList` on your designer and populate the `Images` property with each of these three images, ordered as shown in Figure 21-23, to ensure you can assign the correct `ImageIndex` (0, 1, or 2) to each node.

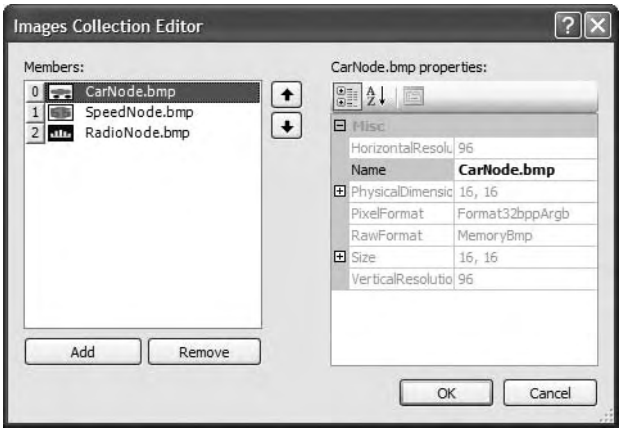


Figure 21-23. *Populating the* `ImageList`

As you recall from Chapter 20, when you incorporate resources (such as bitmaps) into your Visual Studio 2005 solutions, the underlying `*.resx` file is automatically updated. Therefore, these images will be embedded into your assembly with no extra work on your part. Now, using the Properties window, set the `TreeView` control's `ImageList` property to your `ImageList` member variable (see Figure 21-24).

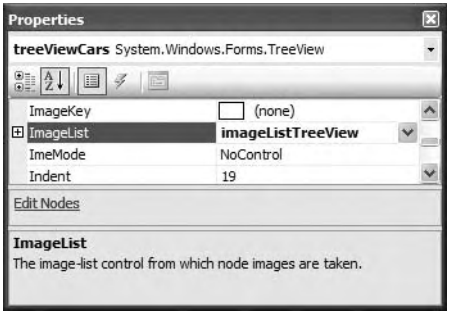


Figure 21-24. *Associating the* `ImageList` *to the* `TreeView`

Last but not least, update your `BuildCarTreeView()` method to specify the correct `ImageIndex` (via constructor arguments) when creating each `TreeNode`:

```
private void BuildCarTreeView()
{
...
    foreach (Car c in listCars)
    {
        treeViewCars.Nodes.Add(new TreeNode(c.petName, 0, 0));

        treeViewCars.Nodes[listCars.IndexOf(c)].Nodes.Add(
            new TreeNode(string.Format("Speed: {0}",
            c.currSp.ToString()), 1, 1));
```

```
            treeViewCars.Nodes[listCars.IndexOf(c)].Nodes.Add(
                new TreeNode(string.Format("Favorite Station: {0} FM",
                c.r.favoriteStation), 2, 2));
        }
...
}
```

Notice that you are specifying each `ImageIndex` twice. The reason for this is that a given `TreeNode` can have two unique images assigned to it: one to display when unselected and another to display when selected. To keep things simple, you are specifying the same image for both possibilities. In any case, Figure 21-25 shows the updated `TreeView` type.

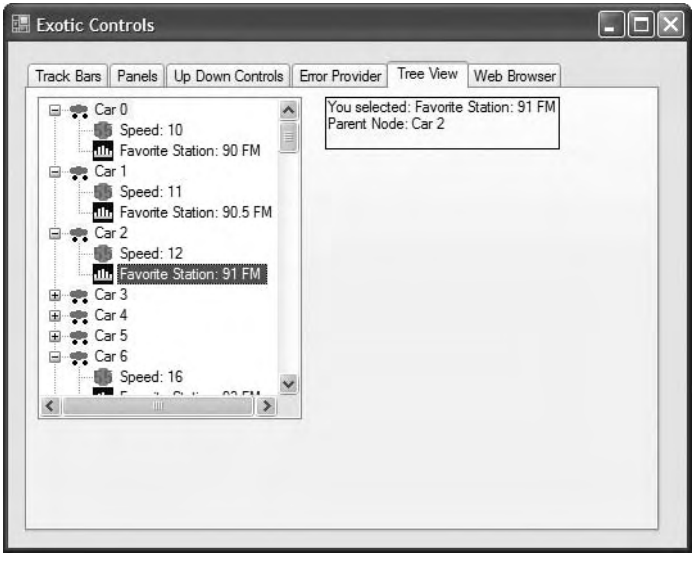


Figure 21-25. *The* `TreeView` *with images*

Fun with WebBrowsers

The final page of this example will make use of the `System.Windows.Forms.WebBrowser` widget, which is new to .NET 2.0. This widget is a highly configurable mini web browser that may be embedded into any `Form`-derived type. As you would expect, this control defines a `Url` property that can be set to any valid URI, formally represented by the `System.Uri` type. On the Web Browser page, add a `WebBrowser` (configured to your liking), a `TextBox` (to enter the URL), and a `Button` (to perform the HTTP request). Figure 21-26 shows the runtime behavior of assigning the `Url` property to `http://www.intertechtraining.com` (yes, a shameless promotion for the company I am employed with).



Figure 21-26. *The* `WebBrowser` *showing the home page of Intertech Training*

The only necessary code to instruct the `WebBrowser` to display the incoming HTTP request form data is to assign the `Url` property, as shown in the following `Button` `Click` event handler:

```
private void btnGO_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Set URL based on value within page's TextBox control.
    myWebBrowser.Url = new System.Uri(txtUrl.Text);
}
```

That wraps up our examination of the widgets of the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace. Although I have not commented on each possible UI element, you should have no problem investigating the others further on your own time. Next up, let's look at the process of building *custom* Windows Forms controls.

■ **Source Code** The ExoticControls project is included under the Chapter 21 directory.

Building Custom Windows Forms Controls

The .NET platform provides a very simple way for developers to build custom UI elements. Unlike (the now legacy) ActiveX controls, Windows Forms controls do not require vast amounts of COM infrastructure or complex memory management. Rather, .NET developers simply build a new class deriving from `UserControl` and populate the type with any number of properties, methods, and events. To demonstrate this process, during the next several pages you'll construct a custom control named `CarControl` using Visual Studio 2005.

■ **Note** As with any .NET application, you are always free to build a custom Windows Forms control using nothing more than the command-line compiler and a simple text editor. As you will see, custom controls reside in a `*.dll` assembly; therefore, you may specify the `/target:dll` option of `csc.exe`.

To begin, fire up Visual Studio 2005 and select a new Windows Control Library workspace named CarControlLibrary (see Figure 21-27).

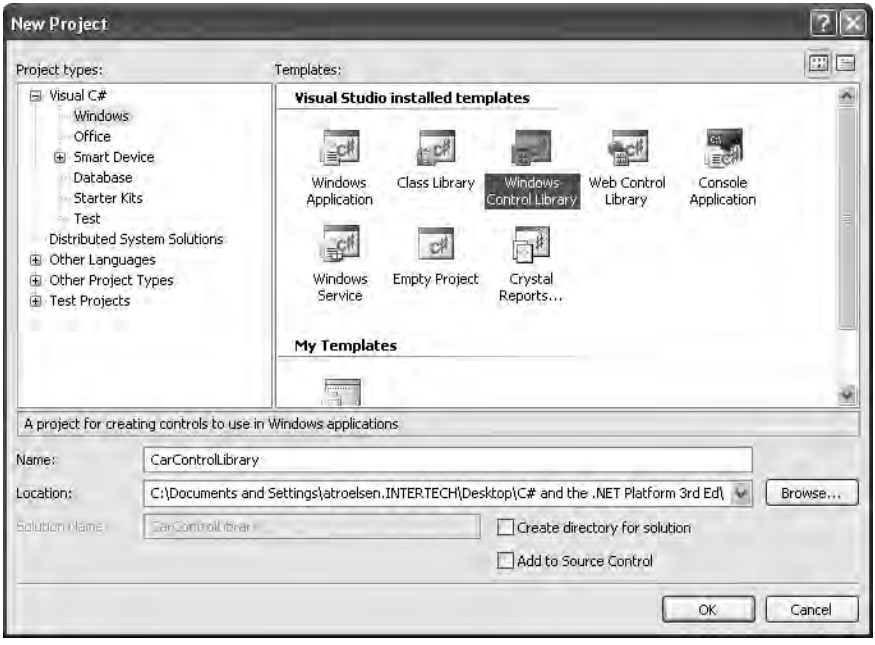


Figure 21-27. *Creating a new Windows Control Library workspace*

When you are finished, rename the initial C# class to `CarControl`. Like a Windows Application project workspace, your custom control is composed of two partial classes. The `*.Designer.cs` file contains all of the designer-generated code, while your primary partial class definition defines a type deriving from `System.Windows.Forms.UserControl`:

```
namespace CarControlLibrary
{
    public partial class CarControl : UserControl
    {
        public CarControl()
        {
            InitializeComponent();
        }
    }
}
```

Before we get too far along, let's establish the big picture of where you are going with this example. The `CarControl` type is responsible for animating through a series of bitmaps that will change based on the internal state of the automobile. If the car's current speed is safely under the car's maximum speed limit, the `CarControl` loops through three bitmap images that render an automobile driving safely along. If the current speed is 10 mph below the maximum speed, the `CarControl` loops through four images, with the fourth image showing the car slowly breaking down. Finally, if the car has surpassed its maximum speed, the `CarControl` loops over five images, where the fifth image represents a doomed automobile.

Creating the Images

Given the preceding design notes, the first order of business is to create a set of five `*.bmp` files for use by the animation loop. If you wish to create custom images, begin by activating the Project ➤ Add New Item menu selection and insert five new bitmap files. If you would rather not showcase your artistic abilities, feel free to use the images that accompany this sample application (keep in mind that I in *no way* consider myself a graphic artist!). The first of these three images (`Lemon1.bmp`, `Lemon2.bmp`, and `Lemon3.bmp`) illustrates a car navigating down the road in a safe and orderly fashion. The final two bitmap images (`AboutToBlow.bmp` and `EngineBlown.bmp`) represent a car approaching its maximum upper limit and its ultimate demise.

Building the Design-Time UI

The next step is to leverage the design-time editor for the `CarControl` type. As you can see, you are presented with a Form-like designer that represents the client area of the control under construction. Using the Toolbox window, add an `ImageList` type to hold each of the bitmaps (named `carImages`), a `Timer` type to control the animation cycle (named `imageTimer`), and a `PictureBox` to hold the current image (named `currentImage`). Don't worry about configuring the size or location of the `PictureBox` type, as you will programmatically position this widget within the bounds of the `CarControl`. However, be sure to set the `SizeMode` property of the `PictureBox` to `StretchImage` via the Properties window. Figure 21-28 shows the story thus far.

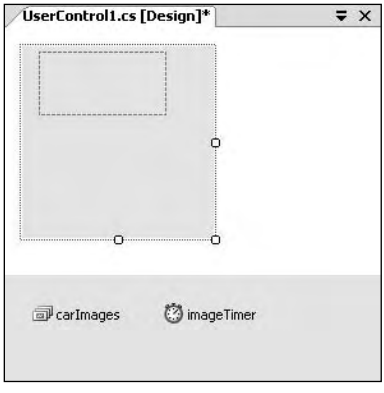


Figure 21-28. *Creating the design-time GUI*

Now, using the Properties window, configure the `ImageList`'s `Images` collection by adding each bitmap to the list. Be aware that you will want to add these items sequentially (`Lemon1.bmp`, `Lemon2.bmp`, `Lemon3.bmp`, `AboutToBlow.bmp`, and `EngineBlown.bmp`) to ensure a linear animation cycle. Also be aware that the default width and height of `*.bmp` files inserted by Visual Studio 2005 is 47×47 pixels. Thus, the `ImageSize` of the `ImageList` should also be set to 47×47 (or else you will have with some skewed rendering). Finally, configure the state of your `Timer` type such that the `Interval` property is set to 200 and is initially disabled.

Implementing the Core CarControl

With this UI prep work out of the way, you can now turn to implementation of the type members. To begin, create a new public enumeration named `AnimFrames`, which has a member representing each item maintained by the `ImageList`. You will make use of this enumeration to determine the current frame to render into the `PictureBox`:

```
// Helper enum for images.
public enum AnimFrames
{
    Lemon1, Lemon2, Lemon3,
    AboutToBlow, EngineBlown
}
```

The `CarControl` type maintains a good number of private data points to represent the animation logic. Here is the rundown of each member:

```
public partial class CarControl : UserControl
{
    // State data.
    private AnimFrames currFrame = AnimFrames.Lemon1;
    private AnimFrames currMaxFrame = AnimFrames.Lemon3;
    private bool IsAnim;
    private int currSp = 50;
    private int maxSp = 100;
    private string carPetName= "Lemon";
    private Rectangle bottomRect = new Rectangle();

    public CarControl()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
    }
}
```

As you can see, you have data points that represent the current and maximum speed, the pet name of the automobile, and two members of type `AnimFrames`. The `currFrame` variable is used to specify which member of the `ImageList` is to be rendered. The `currMaxFrame` variable is used to mark the current upper limit in the `ImageList` (recall that the `CarControl` loops through three to five images based on the current speed). The `IsAnim` data point is used to determine if the car is currently in animation mode. Finally, you have a `Rectangle` member (`bottomRect`), which is used to represent the bottom region of the `CarControl` type. Later, you render the pet name of the automobile into this piece of control real estate.

To divide the `CarControl` into two rectangular regions, create a private helper function named `StretchBox()`. The role of this member is to calculate the correct size of the `bottomRect` member and to ensure that the `PictureBox` widget is stretched out over the upper two-thirds (or so) of the `CarControl` type.

```
private void StretchBox()
{
    // Configure picture box.
    currentImage.Top = 0;
    currentImage.Left = 0;
    currentImage.Height = this.Height - 50;
    currentImage.Width = this.Width;
    currentImage.Image =
        carImages.Images[(int)AnimFrames.Lemon1];
    // Figure out size of bottom rect.
    bottomRect.X = 0;
    bottomRect.Y = this.Height - 50;
    bottomRect.Height = this.Height - currentImage.Height;
    bottomRect.Width = this.Width;
}
```

Once you have carved out the dimensions of each rectangle, call `StretchBox()` from the default constructor:

```
public CarControl()
{
    InitializeComponent();
    StretchBox();
}
```

Defining the Custom Events

The `CarControl` type supports two events that are fired back to the host Form based on the current speed of the automobile. The first event, `AboutToBlow`, is sent out when the `CarControl`'s speed approaches the upper limit. `BlewUp` is sent to the container when the current speed is greater than the allowed maximum. Each of these events leverages a custom delegate (`CarEventHandler`) that can hold the address of any method returning `void` and taking a single `System.String` as its parameter. You'll fire these events in just a moment, but for the time being, add the following members to the public sector of the `CarControl`:

```
// Car events/custom delegate.
public delegate void CarEventHandler(string msg);
public event CarEventHandler AboutToBlow;
public event CarEventHandler BlewUp;
```

■ **Note** Recall that a "prim and proper" delegate (see Chapter 8) would specify two arguments, the first of which is a `System.Object` (to represent the sender), and the second of which is a `System.EventArgs`-derived type. For this example, however, your delegate fits the bill.

Defining the Custom Properties

Like any class type, custom controls may define a set of properties to allow the outside world to interact with the state of the widget. For your current purposes, you are interested only in defining three properties. First, you have `Animate`. This property enables or disables the `Timer` type:

```
// Used to configure the internal Timer type.
public bool Animate
{
    get {return IsAnim;}
```

```
    set
    {
        IsAnim = value;
        imageTimer.Enabled = IsAnim;
    }
}
```

The PetName property is what you would expect and requires little comment. Do notice, however, that when the user sets the pet name, you make a call to Invalidate() to render the name of the CarControl into the bottom rectangular area of the widget (you'll do this step in just a moment):

```
// Configure pet name.
public string PetName
{
    get{return carPetName;}
    set
    {
        carPetName = value;
        Invalidate();
    }
}
```

Next, you have the Speed property. In addition to simply modifying the currSp data member, Speed is the entity that fires the AboutToBlow and BlewUp events based on the current speed of the CarControl. Here is the complete logic:

```
// Adjust currSp and currMaxFrame, and fire our events.
public int Speed
{
    get { return currSp; }
    set
    {
        // Within safe speed?
        if (currSp <= maxSp)
        {
            currSp = value;
            currMaxFrame = AnimFrames.Lemon3;
        }
        // About to explode?
        if ((maxSp - currSp) <= 10)
        {
            if (AboutToBlow != null)
            {
                AboutToBlow("Slow down dude!");
                currMaxFrame = AnimFrames.AboutToBlow;
            }
        }
        // Maxed out?
        if (currSp >= maxSp)
        {
            currSp = maxSp;
            if (BlewUp != null)
            {
                BlewUp("Ug...you're toast...");
                currMaxFrame = AnimFrames.EngineBlown;
            }
        }
    }
}
```

As you can see, if the current speed is 10 mph below the maximum upper speed, you fire the `AboutToBlow` event and adjust the upper frame limit to `AnimFrames.AboutToBlow`. If the user has pushed the limits of your automobile, you fire the `BlewUp` event and set the upper frame limit to `AnimFrames.EngineBlown`. If the speed is below the maximum speed, the upper frame limit remains as `AnimFrames.Lemon3`.

Controlling the Animation

The next detail to attend to is ensuring that the `Timer` type advances the current frame to render within the `PictureBox`. Again, recall that the number of frames to loop through depends on the current speed of the automobile. You only want to bother adjusting the image in the `PictureBox` if the `Animate` property has been set to true. Begin by handling the `Tick` event for the `Timer` type, and flesh out the details as follows:

```
private void imageTimer_Tick(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    if(IsAnim)
        currentImage.Image = carImages.Images[(int)currFrame];
    // Bump frame.
    int nextFrame = ((int)currFrame) + 1;
    currFrame = (AnimFrames)nextFrame;
    if (currFrame > currMaxFrame)
        currFrame = AnimFrames.Lemon1;
}
```

Rendering the Pet Name

Before you can take your control out for a spin, you have one final detail to attend to: rendering the car's moniker. To do this, handle the `Paint` event for your `CarControl`, and within the handler, render the `CarControl`'s pet name into the bottom rectangular region of the client area:

```
private void CarControl_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
{
    // Render the pet name on the bottom of the control.
    Graphics g = e.Graphics;
    g.FillRectangle(Brushes.GreenYellow, bottomRect);
    g.DrawString(PetName, new Font("Times New Roman", 15),
        Brushes.Black, bottomRect);
}
```

At this point, your initial crack at the `CarControl` is complete. Go ahead and build your project.

Testing the CarControl Type

When you run or debug a Windows Control Library project within Visual Studio 2005, the UserControl Test Container (a managed replacement for the now legacy ActiveX Control Test Container) automatically loads your control into its designer test bed. As you can see from Figure 21-29, this tool allows you to set each custom property (as well as all inherited properties) for testing purposes.

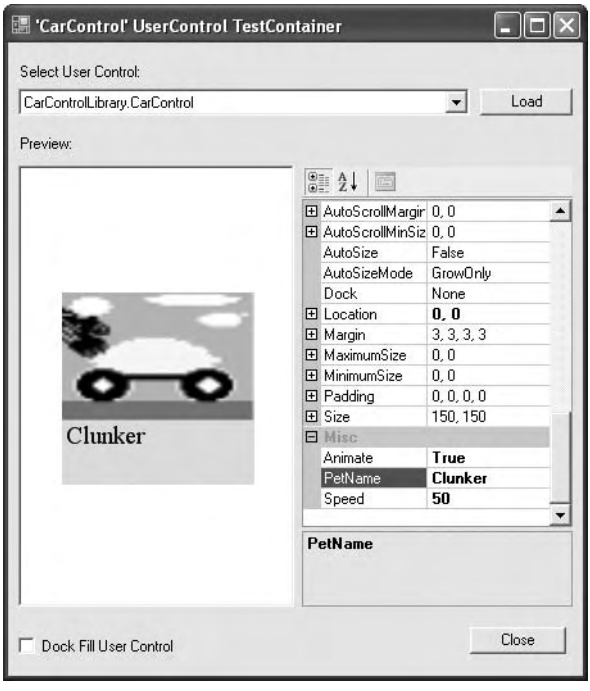


Figure 21-29. *Testing the* `CarControl` *with the UserControl Test Container*

If you set the `Animate` property to true, you should see the `CarControl` cycle through the first three `*.bmp` files. What you are unable to do with this testing utility, however, is handle events. To test this aspect of your UI widget, you need to build a custom Form.

Building a Custom CarControl Form Host

As with all .NET types, you are now able to make use of your custom control from any language targeting the CLR. Begin by closing down the current workspace and creating a new C# Windows Application project named `CarControlTestForm`. To reference your custom controls from within the Visual Studio 2005 IDE, right-click anywhere within the Toolbox window and select the Choose Item menu selection. Using the Browse button on the .NET Framework Components tab, navigate to your `CarControlLibrary.dll` library. Once you click OK, you will find a new icon on the Toolbox named, of course, `CarControl`.

Next, place a new `CarControl` widget onto the Forms designer. Notice that the `Animate`, `PetName`, and `Speed` properties are all exposed through the Properties window. Again, like the UserControl Test Container, the control is "alive" at design time. Thus, if you set the `Animate` property to true, you will find your car is animating on the Forms designer.

Once you have configured the initial state of your `CarControl`, add additional GUI widgets that allow the user to increase and decrease the speed of the automobile, and view the string data sent by the incoming events as well as the car's current speed (`Label` controls will do nicely for these purposes). One possible GUI design is shown in Figure 21-30.

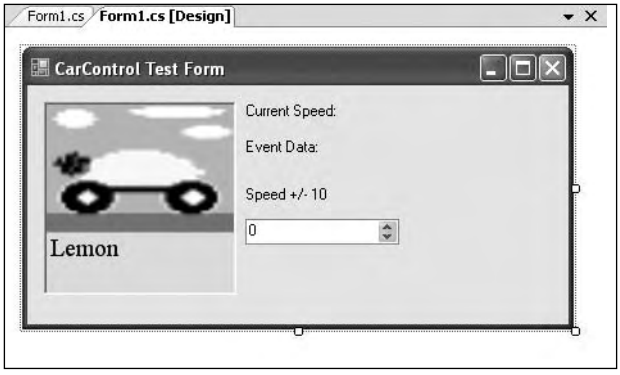


Figure 21-30. *The client-side GUI*

Provided you have created a GUI identical to mine, the code within the `Form`-derived type is quite straightforward (here I am assuming you have handled each of the `CarControl` events using the Properties window):

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    public MainForm()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
        lblCurrentSpeed.Text = string.Format("Current Speed: {0}",
            this.myCarControl.Speed.ToString());
        numericUpDownCarSpeed.Value = myCarControl.Speed;
    }
    private void numericUpDownCarSpeed_ValueChanged(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Assume the min of this NumericUpDown is 0 and max is 300.
        this.myCarControl.Speed = (int)numericUpDownCarSpeed.Value;
        lblCurrentSpeed.Text = string.Format("Current Speed: {0}",
            this.myCarControl.Speed.ToString());
    }
    private void myCarControl_AboutToBlow(string msg)
    { lblEventData.Text = string.Format("Event Data: {0}", msg); }

    private void myCarControl_BlewUp(string msg)
    { lblEventData.Text = string.Format("Event Data: {0}", msg); }
}
```

At this point, you are able to run your client application and interact with the `CarControl`. As you can see, building and using custom controls is a fairly straightforward task, given what you already know about OOP, the .NET type system, GDI+ (aka `System.Drawing.dll`), and Windows Forms.

While you now have enough information to continue exploring the process of .NET Windows controls development, there is one additional programmatic aspect you have to contend with: design-time functionality. Before I describe exactly what this boils down to, you'll need to understand the role of the `System.ComponentModel` namespace.

The Role of the System.ComponentModel Namespace

The `System.ComponentModel` namespace defines a number of attributes (among other types) that allow you to describe how your custom controls should behave at design time. For example, you can opt to supply a textual description of each property, define a default event, or group related properties or events into a custom category for display purposes within the Visual Studio 2005 Properties window. When you are interested in making the sorts of modifications previously mentioned, you will want to make use of the core attributes shown in Table 21-12.

Table 21-12. *Select Members of* `System.ComponentModel`

Attribute	Applied To	Meaning in Life
`BrowsableAttribute`	Properties and events	Specifies whether a property or an event should be displayed in the property browser. By default, all custom properties and events can be browsed.
`CategoryAttribute`	Properties and events	Specifies the name of the category in which to group a property or event.
`DescriptionAttribute`	Properties and events	Defines a small block of text to be displayed at the bottom of the property browser when the user selects a property or event.
`DefaultPropertyAttribute`	Properties	Specifies the default property for the component. This property is selected in the property browser when a user selects the control.
`DefaultValueAttribute`	Properties	Defines a default value for a property that will be applied when the control is "reset" within the IDE.
`DefaultEventAttribute`	Events	Specifies the default event for the component. When a programmer double-clicks the control, stub code is automatically written for the default event.

Enhancing the Design-Time Appearance of CarControl

To illustrate the use of some of these new attributes, close down the CarControlTestForm project and reopen your CarControlLibrary project. Let's create a custom category called "Car Configuration" to which each property and event of the `CarControl` belongs. Also, let's supply a friendly description for each member and default value for each property. To do so, simply update each of the properties and events of the `CarControl` type to support the `[Category]`, `[DefaultValue]`, and `[Description]` attributes as required:

```
public partial class CarControl : UserControl
{
    ...
    [Category("Car Configuration"),
    Description("Sent when the car is approaching terminal speed.")]
    public event CarEventHandler AboutToBlow;
    ...
    [Category("Car Configuration"),
    Description("Name your car!"),
    DefaultValue("Lemon")]
```

```
    public string PetName {...}
...
}
```

Now, let me make a comment on what it means to assign a *default value* to a property, because I can guarantee you it is not what you would (naturally) assume. Simply put, the `[DefaultValue]` attribute does *not* ensure that the underlying value of the data point wrapped by a given property will be automatically initialized to the default value. Thus, although you specified a default value of "No Name" for the `PetName` property, the `carPetName` member variable will not be set to "Lemon" unless you do so via the type's constructor or via member initialization syntax (as you have already done):

```
private string carPetName= "Lemon";
```

Rather, the `[DefaultValue]` attribute comes into play when the programmer "resets" the value of a given property using the Properties window. To reset a property using Visual Studio 2005, select the property of interest, right-click it, and select Reset. In Figure 21-31, notice that the `[Description]` value appears in the bottom pane of the Properties window.

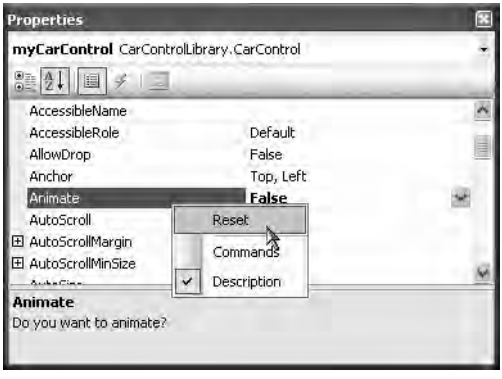


Figure 21-31. *Resetting a property to the default value*

The `[Category]` attribute will be realized only if the programmer selects the categorized view of the Properties window (as opposed to the default alphabetical view) as shown in Figure 21-32.

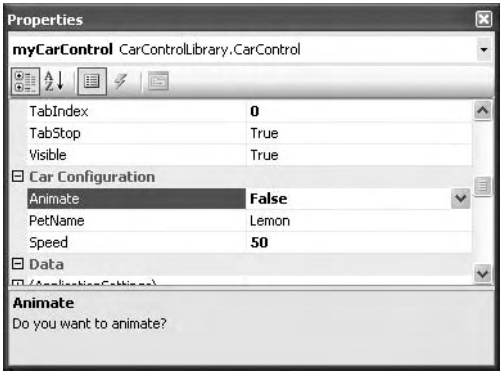


Figure 21-32. *The custom category*

Defining a Default Property and Default Event

In addition to describing and grouping like members into a common category, you may want to configure your controls to support default behaviors. A given control may support a default property. When you define the default property for a class using the `[DefaultProperty]` attribute as follows:

```
//Mark the default property for this control.
[DefaultProperty("Animate")]
public partial class CarControl : UserControl
{...}
```

you ensure that when the user selects this control at design time, the `Animate` property is automatically highlighted in the Properties window. Likewise, if you configure your control to have a default event as follows:

```
// Mark the default event and property for this control.
[DefaultEvent("AboutToBlow"),
DefaultProperty("Animate")]
public partial class CarControl : UserControl
{...}
```

you ensure that when the user double-clicks the widget at design time, stub code is automatically written for the default event (which explains why when you double-click a `Button`, the `Click` event is automatically handled; when you double-click a `Form`, the `Load` event is automatically handled; and so on).

Specifying a Custom Toolbox Bitmap

A final design-time bell-and-whistle any polished custom control should sport is a custom toolbox bitmap image. Currently, when the user selects the `CarControl`, the IDE will show this type within the Toolbox using the default "gear" icon. If you wish to specify a custom image, your first step is to insert a new `*.bmp` file into your project (`CarControl.bmp`) that is configured to be 16×16 pixels in size (established via the `Width` and `Height` properties). Here, I simply reused the `Car` image used in the `TreeView` example.

Once you have created the image as you see fit, use the `[ToolboxBitmap]` attribute (which is applied at the type level) to assign this image to your control. The first argument to the attribute's constructor is the type information for the control itself, while the second argument is the friendly name of the `*.bmp` file.

```
[DefaultEvent("AboutToBlow"),
DefaultProperty("Animate"),
ToolboxBitmap(typeof(CarControl), "CarControl")]
public partial class CarControl : UserControl
{...}
```

The final step is to make sure you set the Build Action value of the control's icon image to Embedded Resource (via the Properties window) to ensure the image data is embedded within your assembly (see Figure 21-33).

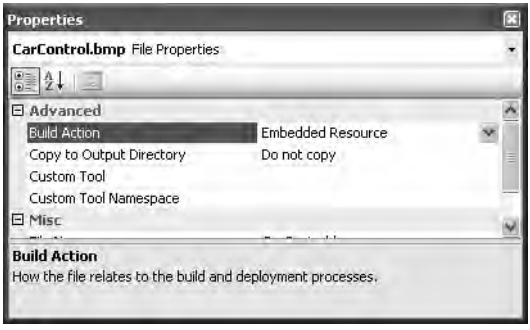


Figure 21-33. *Embedding the image resource*

■ **Note** The reason you are manually embedding the `*.bmp` file (in contrast to when you make use of the `ImageList` type) is that you are not assigning the `CarControl.bmp` file to a UI element at design time, therefore the underlying `*.resx` file will not automatically update.

Once you recompile your Windows Controls library, you can now load your previous CarControlTestForm project. Right-click the current `CarControl` icon within the Toolbox and select Delete. Next, re-add the `CarControl` widget to the Toolbox (by right-clicking and selecting Choose Items). This time, you should see your custom toolbox bitmap (see Figure 21-34).



Figure 21-34. *The custom toolbox bitmap*

So, that wraps up our examination of the process of building custom Windows Forms controls. I hope this example sparked your interest in custom control development. Here, I stuck with the book's automobile theme. Imagine, though, the usefulness of a custom control that will render a pie chart based on the current inventory of a given table in a given database, or a control that extends the functionality of standard UI widgets.

■ **Note** If you are interested in learning more about developing custom Windows Forms controls, pick up a copy of *User Interfaces in C#: Windows Forms and Custom Controls,* by Matthew MacDonald (Apress, 2002).

■ **Source Code** The CarControlLibrary and CarControlTestForm projects are included under the Chapter 21 directory.

Building Custom Dialog Boxes

Now that you have a solid understanding of the core Windows Forms controls and the process of building custom controls, let's examine the construction of custom dialog boxes. The good news is that everything you have already learned about Windows Forms applies directly to dialog box programming. By and large, creating (and showing) a dialog box is no more difficult than inserting a new Form into your current project.

There is no "Dialog" base class in the `System.Windows.Forms` namespace. Rather, a dialog box is simply a stylized Form. For example, many dialog boxes are intended to be nonsizable, therefore you will typically want to set the `FormBorderStyle` property to `FormBorderStyle.FixedDialog`. As well, dialog boxes typically set the `MinimizeBox` and `MaximizeBox` properties to false. In this way, the dialog box is configured to be a fixed constant. Finally, if you set the `ShowInTaskbar` property to false, you will prevent the Form from being visible in the Windows XP task bar.

To illustrate the process of working with dialog boxes, create a new Windows application named SimpleModalDialog. The main `Form` type supports a `MenuStrip` that contains a File ➤ Exit menu item as well as Tools ➤ Configure. Build this UI now, and handle the `Click` event for the Exit and Enter Message menu items. As well, define a string member variable in your main `Form` type (named `userMessage`), and render this data within a `Paint` event handler of your main Form. Here is the current code within the `MainForm.cs` file:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    private string userMessage = "Default Message";

    public MainWindow()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
    }

    private void exitToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        Application.Exit();
    }

    private void configureToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // We will implement this method in just a bit...
    }

    private void MainWindow_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        g.DrawString(userMessage, new Font("Times New Roman", 24), Brushes.DarkBlue,
            50, 50);
    }
}
```

Now add a new Form to your current project using the Project ➤ Add Windows Form menu item named `UserMessageDialog.cs`. Set the `ShowInTaskbar`, `MinimizeBox`, and `MaximizeBox` properties to false. Next, build a UI that consists of two `Button` types (for the OK and Cancel buttons), a single

TextBox (to allow the user to enter her message), and an instructive Label. Figure 21-35 shows one possible UI.

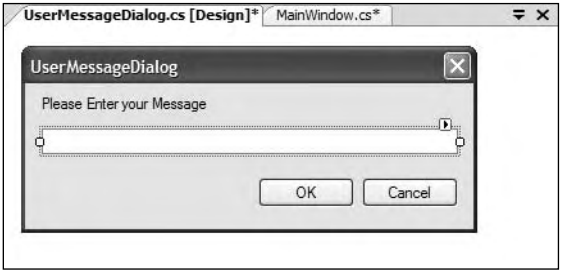


Figure 21-35. *A custom dialog box*

Finally, expose the Text value of the Form's TextBox using a custom property named Message:

```
public partial class UserMessageDialog : Form
{
    public UserMessageDialog()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
    }

    public string Message
    {
        set { txtUserInput.Text = value; }
        get { return txtUserInput.Text; }
    }
}
```

The DialogResult Property

As a final UI task, select the OK button on the Forms designer and find the DialogResult property. Assign DialogResult.OK to your OK button and DialogResult.Cancel to your Cancel button. Formally, you can assign the DialogResult property to any value from the DialogResult enumeration:

```
public enum System.Windows.Forms.DialogResult
{
    Abort, Cancel, Ignore, No,
    None, OK, Retry, Yes
}
```

So, what exactly does it mean to assign a Button's DialogResult value? This property can be assigned to any Button type (as well as the Form itself) and allows the parent Form to determine which button the end user selected. To illustrate, update the Tools ➤ Configure menu handler on the MainForm type as so:

```
private void configureToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Create an instance of UserMessageDialog.
    UserMessageDialog dlg = new UserMessageDialog();

    // Place the current message in the TextBox.
    dlg.Message = userMessage;
```

```
    // If user clicked OK button, render his message.
    if (DialogResult.OK == dlg.ShowDialog())
    {
        userMessage = dlg.Message;
        Invalidate();
    }

    // Have dialog clean up internal widgets now, rather
    // than when the GC destroys the object.
    dlg.Dispose();
}
```

Here, you are showing the `UserMessageDialog` via a call to `ShowDialog()`. This method will launch the Form as a *modal* dialog box which, as you may know, means the user is unable to activate the main form until she dismisses the dialog box. Once the user does dismiss the dialog box (by clicking the OK or Cancel button), the Form is no longer visible, but it is still in memory. Therefore, you are able to ask the `UserMessageDialog` instance (`dlg`) for its new `Message` value in the event the user has clicked the OK button. If so, you render the new message. If not, you do nothing.

■ **Note** If you wish to show a modeless dialog box (which allows the user to navigate between the parent and dialog Forms), call `Show()` rather than `ShowDialog()`.

Understanding Form Inheritance

One very appealing aspect of building dialog boxes under Windows Forms is *form inheritance*. As you are no doubt aware, inheritance is the pillar of OOP that allows one class to extend the functionality of another class. Typically, when you speak of inheritance, you envision one non-GUI type (e.g., `SportsCar`) deriving from another non-GUI type (e.g., `Car`). However, in the world of Windows Forms, it is possible for one Form to derive from another Form and in the process inherit the base class's widgets and implementation.

Form-level inheritance is a very powerful technique, as it allows you to build a base Form that provides core-level functionality for a family of related dialog boxes. If you were to bundle these base-level Forms into a .NET assembly, other members of your team could extend these types using the .NET language of their choice.

For the sake of illustration, assume you wish to subclass the `UserMessageDialog` to build a new dialog box that also allows the user to specify if the message should be rendered in italics. To do so, active the Project ➤ Add Windows Form menu item, but this time add a new Inherited Form named `ItalicUserMessageDialog.cs` (see Figure 21-36).

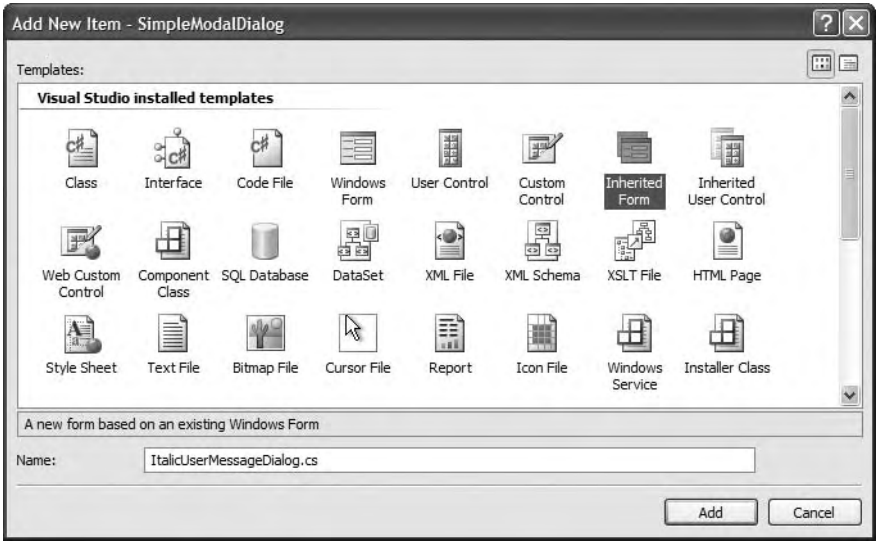


Figure 21-36. *A derived Form*

Once you select Add, you will be shown the *inheritance picker* utility, which allows you to choose from a Form in your current project or select a Form in an external assembly via the Browse button. For this example, select your existing `UserMessageDialog` type. You will find that your new Form type extends your current dialog type rather than directly from Form. At this point, you are free to extend this derived Form any way you choose. For test purposes, simply add a new `CheckBox` control (named `checkBoxItalic`) that is exposed through a property named `Italic`:

```
public partial class ItalicUserMessageDialog :
    SimpleModalDialog.UserMessageDialog
{
    public ItalicUserMessageDialog()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
    }
    public bool Italic
    {
        set { checkBoxItalic.Checked = value; }
        get { return checkBoxItalic.Checked; }
    }
}
```

Now that you have subclassed the basic `UserMessageDialog` type, update your `MainForm` to leverage the new `Italic` property. Simply add a new Boolean member variable that will be used to build an italic `Font` object, and update your Tools ➤ Configure Click menu handler to make use of `ItalicUserMessageDialog`. Here is the complete update:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
    private string userMessage = "Default Message";
    private bool textIsItalic = false;
...
    private void configureToolStripMenuItem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
```

```
    {
        ItalicUserMessageDialog dlg = new ItalicUserMessageDialog();
        dlg.Message = userMessage;
        dlg.Italic = textIsItalic;

        // If user clicked OK button, render his message.
        if (DialogResult.OK == dlg.ShowDialog())
        {
            userMessage = dlg.Message;
            textIsItalic = dlg.Italic;
            Invalidate();
        }
        // Have dialog clean up internal widgets now, rather
        // than when the GC destroys the object.
        dlg.Dispose();
    }

    private void MainWindow_Paint(object sender, PaintEventArgs e)
    {
        Graphics g = e.Graphics;
        Font f = null;
        if(textIsItalic)
            f = new Font("Times New Roman", 24, FontStyle.Italic);
        else
            f = new Font("Times New Roman", 24);
        g.DrawString(userMessage, f, Brushes.DarkBlue,
            50, 50);
    }
}
```

■ **Source Code** The SimpleModalDialog application is included under the Chapter 21 directory.

Dynamically Positioning Windows Forms Controls

To wrap up this chapter, let's examine a few techniques you can use to control the layout of widgets on a Form. By and large, when you build a `Form` type, the assumption is that the controls are rendered using *absolute position*, meaning that if you placed a `Button` on your Forms designer 10 pixels down and 10 pixels over from the upper left portion of the Form, you expect the `Button` to stay put during its lifetime.

On a related note, when you are creating a Form that contains UI controls, you need to decide whether the Form should be resizable. Typically speaking, main windows are resizable, whereas dialog boxes are not. Recall that the resizability of a Form is controlled by the `FormBorderStyle` property, which can be set to any value of the `FormBorderStyle` enum.

```
public enum System.Windows.Forms.FormBorderStyle
{
    None, FixedSingle, Fixed3D,
    FixedDialog, Sizable,
    FixedToolWindow, SizableToolWindow
}
```

Assume that you have allowed your Form to be resizable. This brings up some interesting questions regarding the contained controls. For example, if the user makes the Form smaller than the rectangle needed to display each control, should the controls adjust their size (and possibly location) to morph

The Anchor Property

In Windows Forms, the `Anchor` property is used to define a relative fixed position in which the control should always be rendered. Every `Control`-derived type has an `Anchor` property, which can be set to any of the values from the `AnchorStyles` enumeration described in Table 21-13.

Table 21-13. `AnchorStyles` *Values*

Value	Meaning in Life
`Bottom`	The control's bottom edge is anchored to the bottom edge of its container.
`Left`	The control's left edge is anchored to the left edge of its container.
`None`	The control is not anchored to any edges of its container.
`Right`	The control's right edge is anchored to the right edge of its container.
`Top`	The control's top edge is anchored to the top edge of its container.

To anchor a widget at the upper-left corner, you are free to OR styles together (e.g., `AnchorStyles.Top ➤ AnchorStyles.Left`). Again, the idea behind the `Anchor` property is to configure which edges of the control are anchored to the edges of its container. For example, if you configure a `Button` with the following `Anchor` value:

```
// Anchor this widget relative to the right position.
myButton.Anchor = AnchorStyles.Right;
```

you are ensured that as the Form is resized, this `Button` maintains its position relative to the right side of the Form.

The Dock Property

Another aspect of Windows Forms programming is establishing the *docking behavior* of your controls. If you so choose, you can set a widget's `Dock` property to configure which side (or sides) of a Form the widget should be attached to. The value you assign to a control's `Dock` property is honored, regardless of the Form's current dimensions. Table 21-14 describes possible options.

Table 21-14. `DockStyle` *Values*

Value	Meaning in Life
`Bottom`	The control's bottom edge is docked to the bottom of its containing control.
`Fill`	All the control's edges are docked to all the edges of its containing control and sized appropriately.
`Left`	The control's left edge is docked to the left edge of its containing control.
`None`	The control is not docked.
`Right`	The control's right edge is docked to the right edge of its containing control.
`Top`	The control's top edge is docked to the top of its containing control.

So, for example, if you want to ensure that a given widget is always docked on the left side of a Form, you would write the following:

```
// This item is always located on the left of the Form, regardless
// of the Form's current size.
myButton.Dock = DockStyle.Left;
```

To help you understand the implications of setting the `Anchor` and `Dock` properties, the downloadable code for this book contains a project named AnchoringControls. Once you build and run this application, you can make use of the Form's menu system to set various `AnchorStyles` and `DockStyle` values and observe the change in behavior of the `Button` type (see Figure 21-37).

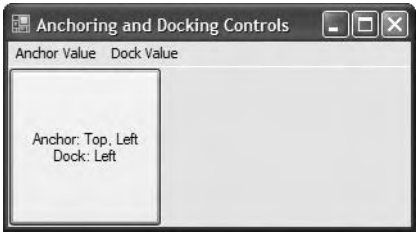


Figure 21-37. *The AnchoringControls application*

Be sure to resize the Form when changing the `Anchor` property to observe how the `Button` responds.

■ **Source Code** The AnchoringControls application is included under the Chapter 21 directory.

Table and Flow Layout

.NET 2.0 offers an additional way to control the layout of a Form's widgets using one of two layout managers. The `TableLayoutPanel` and `FlowLayoutPanel` types can be docked into a Form's client area to arrange the internal controls. For example, assume you place a new `FlowLayoutPanel` widget onto the Forms designer and configure it to dock fully within the parent Form (see Figure 21-38).

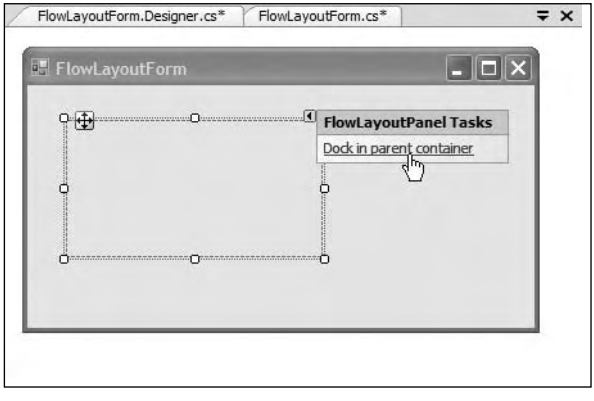


Figure 21-38. *Docking a* `FlowLayoutPanel` *into a Form*

Now, add ten new `Button` types within the `FlowLayoutPanel` using the Forms designer. If you now run your application, you will notice that the ten `Button`s automatically rearrange themselves in a manner very close to standard HTML.

On the other hand, if you create a Form that contains a `TableLayoutPanel`, you are able to build a UI that is partitioned into various "cells" (see Figure 21-39).

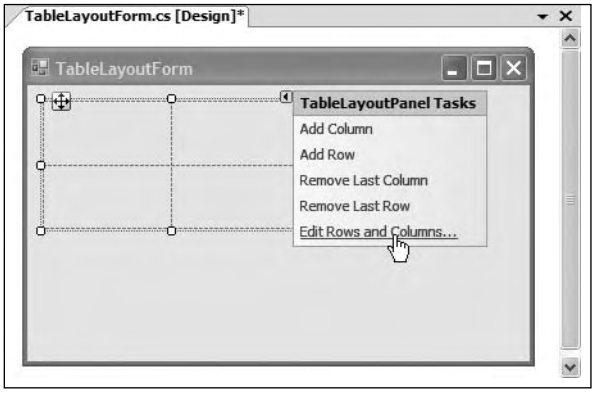


Figure 21-39. *The* `TableLayoutPanel` *type*

If you select the Edit Rows and Columns inline menu option using the Forms designer (as shown in Figure 21-39), you are able to control the overall format of the `TableLayoutPanel` on a cell-by-cell basis (see Figure 21-40).

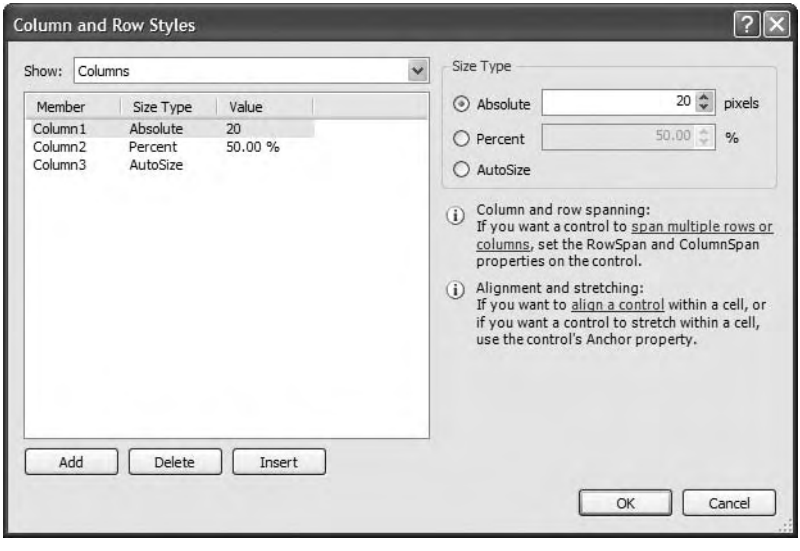


Figure 21-40. *Configuring the cells of the* `TableLayoutPanel` *type*

Truth be told, the only way to see the effects of the `TableLayoutPanel` type is to do so in a hands-on manner. I'll let interested readers handle that task.

Summary

This chapter rounded off your understanding of the Windows Forms namespace by examining the programming of numerous GUI widgets, from the simple (e.g., `Label`) to the more exotic (e.g., `TreeView`). After examining numerous control types, you moved on to cover the construction of custom controls, including the topic of design-time integration.

In the latter half of this chapter, you learned how to build custom dialog boxes and how to derive a new Form from an existing `Form` type using form inheritance. This chapter concluded by briefly exploring the various anchoring and docking behaviors you can use to enforce a specific layout of your GUI types, as well as the new .NET 2.0 layout managers.

CHAPTER 22

Database Access with ADO.NET

Unless you are a video game developer by trade, you are probably interested in the topic of database access. As you would expect, the .NET platform defines a number of namespaces that allow you to interact with local and remote data stores. Collectively speaking, these namespaces are known as *ADO.NET*.

In this chapter, once I frame the overall role of ADO.NET (in the next section), I'll move on to discuss the topic of ADO.NET data providers. The .NET platform supports numerous data providers, each of which is optimized to communicate with a specific database management system (Microsoft SQL Server, Oracle, MySQL, etc.). After you understand how to manipulate a specific data provider, you will then examine the new data provider factory pattern offered by .NET 2.0. Using types within the `System.Data.Common` namespace (and a related `app.config` file), you are able to build a single code base that can dynamically pick and choose the underlying data provider without the need to recompile or redeploy the application's code base.

The remaining part of this chapter examines how to programmatically interact with relational databases using your data provider of choice. As you will see, ADO.NET provides two distinct ways to interface with a data source, often termed the *connected layer* and *disconnected layer*. You will come to know the role of connection objects, command objects, data readers, data adapters, and numerous types within the `System.Data` namespace (specifically, `DataSet`, `DataTable`, `DataRow`, `DataColumn`, `DataView`, and `DataRelation`).

A High-Level Definition of ADO.NET

If you have a background in Microsoft's previous COM-based data access model (Active Data Objects, or ADO), understand that ADO.NET has very little to do with ADO beyond the letters "A," "D," and "O." While it is true that there is some relationship between the two systems (e.g., each has the concept of connection and command objects), some familiar ADO types (e.g., the `Recordset`) no longer exist. Furthermore, there are a number of new ADO.NET types that have no direct equivalent under classic ADO (e.g., the data adapter).

Unlike classic ADO, which was primarily designed for tightly coupled client/server systems, ADO.NET was built with the disconnected world in mind, using `DataSets`. This type represents a local copy of any number of related tables. Using the `DataSet`, the client tier is able to manipulate and update its contents while disconnected from the data source, and it can submit the modified data back for processing using a related data adapter.

Another major difference between classic ADO and ADO.NET is that ADO.NET has deep support for XML data representation. In fact, the data obtained from a data store is serialized (by default) as XML. Given that XML is often transported between layers using standard HTTP, ADO.NET is not limited by firewall constraints.

■ **Note** As of .NET 2.0, `DataSet`s (and `DataTable`s) can now be serialized in a binary format via the `RemotingFormat` property. This can be helpful when building distributed systems using the .NET remoting layer (see Chapter 18), as binary data is much more compact than XML data.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between classic ADO and ADO.NET is that ADO.NET is a managed library of code, therefore it plays by the same rules as any managed library. The types that make up ADO.NET use the CLR memory management protocol, adhere to the same type system (classes, interfaces, enums, structures, and delegates), and can be accessed by any .NET language.

The Two Faces of ADO.NET

The ADO.NET libraries can be used in two conceptually unique manners: connected or disconnected. When you are making use of the *connected layer*, your code base will explicitly connect to and disconnect from the underlying data store. When you are using ADO.NET in this manner, you typically interact with the data store using connection objects, command objects, and data reader objects. As you will see later in this chapter, data readers provide a way to pull records from a data store using a forward-only, read-only approach (much like a fire-hose cursor).

The disconnected layer, on the other hand, allows you to obtain a set of `DataTable` objects (contained within a `DataSet`) that functions as a client-side copy of the external data. When you obtain a `DataSet` using a related data adapter object, the connection is automatically opened and closed on your behalf. As you would guess, this approach helps quickly free up connections for other callers. Once the client receives a `DataSet`, it is able to traverse and manipulate the contents without incurring the cost of network traffic. As well, if the client wishes to submit the changes back to the data store, the data adapter (in conjunction with a set of SQL statements) is used once again to update the data source, at which point the connection is closed immediately.

Understanding ADO.NET Data Providers

ADO.NET does not provide a single set of types that communicate with multiple database management systems (DBMSs). Rather, ADO.NET supports multiple *data providers*, each of which is optimized to interact with a specific DBMS. The first benefit of this approach is that a specific data provider can be programmed to access any unique features of the DBMS. Another benefit is that a specific data provider is able to directly connect to the underlying engine of the DBMS without an intermediate mapping layer standing between the tiers.

Simply put, a *data provider* is a set of types defined in a given namespace that understand how to communicate with a specific data source. Regardless of which data provider you make use of, each defines a set of class types that provide core functionality. Table 22-1 documents some (but not all) of the core common objects, their base class (all defined in the `System.Data.Common` namespace), and their implemented data-centric interfaces (each defined in the `System.Data` namespace).

Table 22-1. *Core Objects of an ADO.NET Data Provider*

Object	Base Class	Implemented Interfaces	Meaning in Life
`Connection`	`DbConnection`	`IDbConnection`	Provides the ability to connect to and disconnect from the data store. Connection objects also provide access to a related transaction object.
`Command`	`DbCommand`	`IDbCommand`	Represents a SQL query or name of a stored procedure. Command objects also provide access to the provider's data reader object.
`DataReader`	`DbDataReader`	`IDataReader`, `IDataRecord`	Provides forward-only, read-only access to data.
`DataAdapter`	`DbDataAdapter`	`IDataAdapter`, `IDbDataAdapter`	Transfers `DataSets` between the caller and the data store. Data adapters contain a set of four internal command objects used to select, insert, update, and delete information from the data store.
`Parameter`	`DbParameter`	`IDataParameter`, `IDbDataParameter`	Represents a named parameter within a parameterized query.
`Transaction`	`DbTransaction`	`IDbTransaction`	Performs a database transaction.

Although the names of these types will differ among data providers (e.g., `SqlConnection` versus `OracleConnection` versus `OdbcConnection` versus `MySqlConnection`), each object derives from the same base class that implements identical interfaces. Given this, you are correct to assume that once you learn how to work with one data provider, the remaining providers are quite straightforward.

■ **Note** As a naming convention, the objects in a specific data provider are prefixed with the name of the related DBMS.

Figure 22-1 illustrates the big picture behind ADO.NET data providers. Note that in the diagram, the "Client Assembly" can literally be any type of .NET application: console program, Windows Forms application, ASP.NET web page, XML web service, .NET code library, and so on.

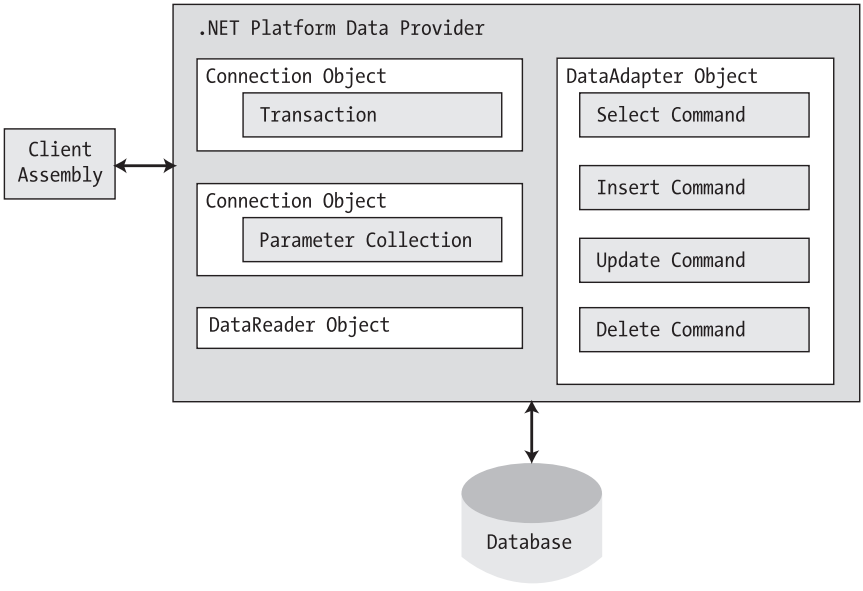


Figure 22-1. *ADO.NET data providers provide access to a given DBMS.*

Now, to be sure, a data provider will supply you with other types beyond the objects shown in Figure 22-1. However, these core objects define a common baseline across all data providers.

Microsoft-Supplied Data Providers

As of version 2.0, Microsoft's .NET distribution ships with numerous data providers, including a provider for Oracle, SQL Server, and ODBC-style connectivity. Table 22-2 documents the namespace and containing assembly for each Microsoft ADO.NET data provider.

Table 22-2. *Microsoft ADO.NET Data Providers*

Data Provider	Namespace	Assembly
OLE DB	`System.Data.OleDb`	`System.Data.dll`
Microsoft SQL Server	`System.Data.SqlClient`	`System.Data.dll`
Microsoft SQL Server Mobile	`System.Data.SqlServerCe`	`System.Data.SqlServerCe.dll`
ODBC	`System.Data.Odbc`	`System.Data.dll`
Oracle	`System.Data.OracleClient`	`System.Data.OracleClient.dll`

■ **Note** There is no specific data provider that maps directly to the Jet engine (and therefore Microsoft Access). If you wish to interact with an Access data file, you can do so using the OLE DB or ODBC data provider.

The OLE DB data provider, which is composed of the types defined in the `System.Data.OleDb` namespace, allows you to access data located in any data store that supports the classic COM-based OLE DB protocol. Using this provider, you may communicate with any OLE DB–compliant database simply by tweaking the "Provider" segment of your connection string. Be aware, however, that the OLE DB provider interacts with various COM objects behind the scenes, which can affect the performance of your application. By and large, the OLE DB data provider is only useful if you are interacting with a DBMS that does not define a specific .NET data provider.

The Microsoft SQL Server data provider offers direct access to Microsoft SQL Server data stores, and *only* SQL Server data stores (version 7.0 and greater). The `System.Data.SqlClient` namespace contains the types used by the SQL Server provider and offers the same basic functionality as the OLE DB provider. The key difference is that the SQL Server provider bypasses the OLE DB layer and thus gives numerous performance benefits. As well, the Microsoft SQL Server data provider allows you to gain access to the unique features of this particular DBMS.

■ **Note** If you are interested in making use of the `System.Data.SqlServerCe`, `System.Data.Odbc`, or `System.Data.Oracle` namespaces, check out the details as you see fit using the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation.

Select Third-Party Data Providers

In addition to the data providers that ship from Microsoft, numerous third-party data providers exist for various open source and commercial databases. Table 22-3 documents where to obtain managed providers for several databases that do not directly ship with Microsoft .NET 2.0 (please note that the provided URLs are subject to change).

Table 22-3. *Third-Party ADO.NET Data Providers*

Data Provider	Website
Firebird Interbase	`http://www.mono-project.com/Firebird_Interbase`
IBM DB2 Universal Database	`http://www-306.ibm.com/software/data/db2`
MySQL	`http://dev.mysql.com/downloads/connector/net/1.0.html`
PostgreSQL	`http://www.mono-project.com/PostgreSQL`
Sybase	`http://www.mono-project.com/Sybase`

■ **Note** Given the large number of ADO.NET data providers, the examples in this chapter will make use of the Microsoft SQL Server data provider (`System.Data.SqlClient`). If you intend to use ADO.NET to interact with another DBMS, you should have no problem doing so once you understand the material presented in the pages that follow.

Additional ADO.NET Namespaces

In addition to the .NET namespaces that define the types of a specific data provider, the base class libraries provide a number of additional ADO.NET-centric namespaces, as shown in Table 22-4.

Table 22-4. *Additional ADO.NET-centric Namespaces*

Namespace	Meaning in Life
`Microsoft.SqlServer.Server`	This new .NET 2.0 namespace provides types that allow you to author stored procedures via managed languages for SQL Server 2005.
`System.Data`	This namespace defines the core ADO.NET types used by all data providers.
`System.Data.Common`	This namespace contains types shared between data providers, including the .NET 2.0 data provider factory types.
`System.Data.Design`	This new .NET 2.0 namespace contains various types used to construct a design-time appearance for custom data components.
`System.Data.Sql`	This new .NET 2.0 namespace contains types that allow you to discover Microsoft SQL Server instances installed on the current local network.
`System.Data.SqlTypes`	This namespace contains native data types used by Microsoft SQL Server. Although you are always free to use the corresponding CLR data types, the `SqlTypes` are optimized to work with SQL Server.

Do understand that this chapter will not examine each and every type within each and every ADO.NET namespace (that task would require a large book in and of itself). However, it is quite important for you to understand the types within the `System.Data` namespace.

The System.Data Types

Of all the ADO.NET namespaces, `System.Data` is the lowest common denominator. You simply cannot build ADO.NET applications without specifying this namespace in your data access applications. This namespace contains types that are shared among all ADO.NET data providers, regardless of the underlying data store. In addition to a number of database-centric exceptions (`NoNullAllowedException`, `RowNotInTableException`, `MissingPrimaryKeyException`, and the like), `System.Data` contains types that represent various database primitives (tables, rows, columns, constraints, etc.), as well as the common interfaces implemented by data provider objects. Table 22-5 lists some of the core types to be aware of.

Table 22-5. *Core Members of the* `System.Data` *Namespace*

Type	Meaning in Life
`Constraint`	Represents a constraint for a given `DataColumn` object
`DataColumn`	Represents a single column within a `DataTable` object
`DataRelation`	Represents a parent/child relationship between two `DataTable` objects
`DataRow`	Represents a single row within a `DataTable` object
`DataSet`	Represents an in-memory cache of data consisting of any number of interrelated `DataTable` objects
`DataTable`	Represents a tabular block of in-memory data
`DataTableReader`	Allows you to treat a `DataTable` as a fire-hose cursor (forward only, read-only data access); new in .NET 2.0

Type	Meaning in Life
DataView	Represents a customized view of a DataTable for sorting, filtering, searching, editing, and navigation
IDataAdapter	Defines the core behavior of a data adapter object
IDataParameter	Defines the core behavior of a parameter object
IDataReader	Defines the core behavior of a data reader object
IDbCommand	Defines the core behavior of a command object
IDbDataAdapter	Extends IDataAdapter to provide additional functionality of a data adapter object
IDbTransaction	Defines the core behavior of a transaction object

Later in this chapter, you will get to know the role of the DataSet and its related cohorts (DataTable, DataRelation, DataRow, etc.). However, your next task is to examine the core interfaces of System.Data at a high level, to better understand the common functionality offered by any data provider. You will learn specific details throughout this chapter, so for the time being let's simply focus on the overall behavior of each interface type.

The Role of the IDbConnection Interface

First up is the IDbConnection type, which is implemented by a data provider's *connection object*. This interface defines a set of members used to configure a connection to a specific data store, and it also allows you to obtain the data provider's transactional object. Here is the formal definition of IDbConnection:

```
public interface IDbConnection : IDisposable
{
    string ConnectionString { get; set; }
    int ConnectionTimeout { get; }
    string Database { get; }
    ConnectionState State { get; }
    IDbTransaction BeginTransaction();
    IDbTransaction BeginTransaction(IsolationLevel il);
    void ChangeDatabase(string databaseName);
    void Close();
    IDbCommand CreateCommand();
    void Open();
}
```

The Role of the IDbTransaction Interface

As you can see, the overloaded BeginTransaction() method defined by IDbConnection provides access to the provider's *transaction object*. Using the members defined by IDbTransaction, you are able to programmatically interact with a transactional session and the underlying data store:

```
public interface IDbTransaction : IDisposable
{
    IDbConnection Connection { get; }
    IsolationLevel IsolationLevel { get; }
    void Commit();
    void Rollback();
}
```

The Role of the IDbCommand Interface

Next, we have the `IDbCommand` interface, which will be implemented by a data provider's *command object*. Like other data access object models, command objects allow programmatic manipulation of SQL statements, stored procedures, and parameterized queries. In addition, command objects provide access to the data provider's data reader type via the overloaded `ExecuteReader()` method:

```
public interface IDbCommand :  IDisposable
{
    string CommandText { get; set; }
    int CommandTimeout { get; set; }
    CommandType CommandType { get; set; }
    IDbConnection Connection { get; set; }
    IDataParameterCollection Parameters { get; }
    IDbTransaction Transaction { get; set; }
    UpdateRowSource UpdatedRowSource { get; set; }
    void Cancel();
    IDbDataParameter CreateParameter();
    int ExecuteNonQuery();
    IDataReader ExecuteReader();
    IDataReader ExecuteReader(CommandBehavior behavior);
    object ExecuteScalar();
    void Prepare();
}
```

The Role of the IDbDataParameter and IDataParameter Interfaces

Notice that the `Parameters` property of `IDbCommand` returns a strongly typed collection that implements `IDataParameterCollection`. This interface provides access to a set of `IDbDataParameter`-compliant class types (e.g., parameter objects):

```
public interface IDbDataParameter : IDataParameter
{
    byte Precision { get; set; }
    byte Scale { get; set; }
    int Size { get; set; }
}
```

`IDbDataParameter` extends the `IDataParameter` interface to obtain the following additional behaviors:

```
public interface IDataParameter
{
    DbType DbType { get; set; }
    ParameterDirection Direction { get; set; }
    bool IsNullable { get; }
    string ParameterName { get; set; }
    string SourceColumn { get; set; }
    DataRowVersion SourceVersion { get; set; }
    object Value { get; set; }
}
```

As you will see, the functionality of the `IDbDataParameter` and `IDataParameter` interfaces allows you to represent parameters within a SQL command (including stored procedures) via specific ADO.NET parameter objects rather than hard-coded string literals.

The Role of the IDbDataAdapter and IDataAdapter Interfaces

Data adapters are used to push and pull `DataSets` to and from a given data store. Given this, the `IDbDataAdapter` interface defines a set of properties that are used to maintain the SQL statements for the related select, insert, update, and delete operations:

```
public interface IDbDataAdapter : IDataAdapter
{
    IDbCommand DeleteCommand { get; set; }
    IDbCommand InsertCommand { get; set; }
    IDbCommand SelectCommand { get; set; }
    IDbCommand UpdateCommand { get; set; }
}
```

In addition to these four properties, an ADO.NET data adapter also picks up the behavior defined in the base interface, `IDataAdapter`. This interface defines the key function of a data adapter type: the ability to transfer `DataSets` between the caller and underlying data store using the `Fill()` and `Update()` methods.

As well, the `IDataAdapter` interface allows you to map database column names to more user-friendly display names via the `TableMappings` property:

```
public interface IDataAdapter
{
    MissingMappingAction MissingMappingAction { get; set; }
    MissingSchemaAction MissingSchemaAction { get; set; }
    ITableMappingCollection TableMappings { get; }
    int Fill(System.Data.DataSet dataSet);
    DataTable[] FillSchema(DataSet dataSet, SchemaType schemaType);
    IDataParameter[] GetFillParameters();
    int Update(DataSet dataSet);
}
```

The Role of the IDataReader and IDataRecord Interfaces

The next key interface to be aware of is `IDataReader`, which represents the common behaviors supported by a given data reader object. When you obtain an `IDataReader`-compatible type from an ADO.NET data provider, you are able to iterate over the result set in a forward-only, read-only manner.

```
public interface IDataReader : IDisposable, IDataRecord
{
    int Depth { get; }
    bool IsClosed { get; }
    int RecordsAffected { get; }
    void Close();
    DataTable GetSchemaTable();
    bool NextResult();
    bool Read();
}
```

Finally, as you can see, `IDataReader` extends `IDataRecord`, which defines a good number of members that allow you to extract a strongly typed value from the stream, rather than casting the generic `System.Object` retrieved from the data reader's overloaded indexer method. Here is a partial listing of the various `GetXXX()` methods defined by `IDataRecord` (see the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for a complete listing):

```
public interface IDataRecord
{
    int FieldCount { get; }
    object this[ string name ] { get; }
    object this[ int i ] { get; }
    bool GetBoolean(int i);
    byte GetByte(int i);
    char GetChar(int i);
    DateTime GetDateTime(int i);
    Decimal GetDecimal(int i);
    float GetFloat(int i);
    short GetInt16(int i);
    int GetInt32(int i);
    long GetInt64(int i);
...
    bool IsDBNull(int i);
}
```

■ **Note** The `IDataReader.IsDBNull()` method can be used to programmatically discover if a specified field is set to `null` before obtaining a value from the data reader (to avoid triggering a runtime exception).

Abstracting Data Providers Using Interfaces

At this point, you should have a better idea of the common functionality found among all .NET data providers. Recall that even though the exact names of the implementing types will differ among data providers, you are able to program against these types in a similar manner—that's the beauty of interface-based polymorphism. Therefore, if you define a method that takes an `IDbConnection` parameter, you can pass in any ADO.NET connection object:

```
public static void OpenConnection(IDbConnection cn)
{
    // Open the incoming connection for the caller.
    cn.Open();
}
```

The same holds true for a member return value. For example, consider the following simple C# program, which allows the caller to obtain a specific connection object using the value of a custom enumeration (assume you have "used" `System.Data`):

```
namespace ConnectionApp
{
    enum DataProvider
    { SqlServer, OleDb, Odbc, Oracle }

    class Program
    {
        static void Main(string[] args)
        {
            // Get a specific connection.
            IDbConnection myCn = GetConnection(DataProvider.SqlServer);

            // Assume we wish to connect to the SQL Server Pubs database.
            myCn.ConnectionString =
                "Data Source=localhost;uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Pubs";
```

```
            // Now open connection via our helper function.
            OpenConnection(myCn);

            // Use connection and close when finished.
            ...
            myCn.Close();
        }

        static IDbConnection GetConnection(DataProvider dp)
        {
            IDbConnection conn = null;
            switch (dp)
            {
                case DataProvider.SqlServer:
                    conn = new SqlConnection();
                    break;
                case DataProvider.OleDb:
                    conn = new OleDbConnection();
                    break;
                case DataProvider.Odbc:
                    conn = new OdbcConnection();
                    break;
                case DataProvider.Oracle:
                    conn = new OracleConnection();
                    break;
            }
            return conn;
        }
    }
}
```

The benefit of working with the general interfaces of `System.Data` is that you have a much better chance of building a flexible code base that can evolve over time. For example, perhaps today you are building an application targeting Microsoft SQL Server, but what if your company switches to Oracle months down the road? If you hard-code the types of `System.Data.SqlClient`, you will obviously need to edit, recompile, and redeploy the assembly.

Increasing Flexibility Using Application Configuration Files

To further increase the flexibility of your ADO.NET applications, you could incorporate a client-side `*.config` file that makes use of custom key/value pairs within the `<appSettings>` element. Recall from Chapter 11 that custom data can be programmatically obtained using types within the `System.Configuration` namespace. For example, assume you have specified the connection string and data provider values within a configuration file as so:

```
<configuration>
  <appSettings>
    <add key="provider" value="SqlServer" />
    <add key="cnStr" value=
      "Data Source=localhost;uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Pubs"/>
  </appSettings>
</configuration>
```

With this, you could update `Main()` to programmatically read these values. By doing so, you essentially build a *data provider factory*. Here are the relevant updates:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Read the provider key.
    string dpStr = ConfigurationManager.AppSettings["provider"];
    DataProvider dp = (DataProvider)Enum.Parse(typeof(DataProvider), dpStr);

    // Read the cnStr.
    string cnStr = ConfigurationManager.AppSettings["cnStr"];

    // Get a specific connection.
    IDbConnection myCn = GetConnection(dp);
    myCn.ConnectionString = cnStr;
...
}
```

■ **Note** The `ConfigurationManager` type is new to .NET 2.0. Be sure to set a reference to the `System.Configuration.dll` assembly and "use" the `System.Configuration` namespace.

If the previous example were reworked into a .NET code library (rather than a console application), you would be able to build any number of clients that could obtain specific connections using various layers of abstraction. However, to make a worthwhile data provider factory library, you would also have to account for command objects, data readers, data adapters, and other data-centric types. While building such a code library would not necessarily be difficult, it would require a good amount of code. Thankfully, as of .NET 2.0, the kind folks in Redmond have built this very thing into the base class libraries.

■ **Source Code** The MyConnectionFactory project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

The .NET 2.0 Provider Factory Model

Under .NET 2.0, we are now offered a data provider factory pattern that allows us to build a single code base using generalized data access types. Furthermore, using application configuration files (and the spiffy new `<connectionStrings>` section), we are able to obtain providers and connection strings declaratively without the need to recompile or redeploy the client software.

To understand the data provider factory implementation, recall from Table 22-1 that the objects within a data provider each derive from the same base classes defined within the `System.Data.Common` namespace:

- `DbCommand`: Abstract base class for all command objects
- `DbConnection`: Abstract base class for all connection objects
- `DbDataAdapter`: Abstract base class for all data adapter objects
- `DbDataReader`: Abstract base class for all data reader objects
- `DbParameter`: Abstract base class for all parameter objects
- `DbTransaction`: Abstract base class for all transaction objects

In addition, as of .NET 2.0, each of the Microsoft-supplied data providers now provides a specific class deriving from `System.Data.Common.DbProviderFactory`. This base class defines a number of methods that retrieve provider-specific data objects. Here is a snapshot of the relevant members of `DbProviderFactory`:

```
public abstract class DbProviderFactory
{
...
    public virtual DbCommand CreateCommand();
    public virtual DbCommandBuilder CreateCommandBuilder();
    public virtual DbConnection CreateConnection();
    public virtual DbConnectionStringBuilder CreateConnectionStringBuilder();
    public virtual DbDataAdapter CreateDataAdapter();
    public virtual DbDataSourceEnumerator CreateDataSourceEnumerator();
    public virtual DbParameter CreateParameter();
}
```

To obtain the `DbProviderFactory`-derived type for your data provider, the `System.Data.Common` namespace provides a class type named `DbProviderFactories` (note the plural in this type's name). Using the static `GetFactory()` method, you are able to obtain the specific (which is to say, singular) `DbProviderFactory` of the specified data provider, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Get the factory for the SQL data provider.
    DbProviderFactory sqlFactory =
        DbProviderFactories.GetFactory("System.Data.SqlClient");
...
    // Get the factory for the Oracle data provider.
    DbProviderFactory oracleFactory =
        DbProviderFactories.GetFactory("System.Data.OracleClient");
...
}
```

As you might be thinking, rather than obtaining a factory using a hard-coded string literal, you could read in this information from a client-side `*.config` file (much like the previous MyConnectionFactory example). You will do so in just a bit. However, in any case, once you have obtained the factory for your data provider, you are able to obtain the associated provider-specific data objects (connections, commands, etc.).

Registered Data Provider Factories

Before you look at a full example of working with ADO.NET data provider factories, it is important to point out that the `DbProviderFactories` type (as of .NET 2.0) is able to fetch factories for only a subset of all possible data providers. The list of valid provider factories is recorded within the `<DbProviderFactories>` element within the `machine.config` file for your .NET 2.0 installation (note that the value of the `invariant` attribute is identical to the value passed into the `DbProviderFactories.GetFactory()` method):

```
<system.data>
  <DbProviderFactories>
    <add name="Odbc Data Provider" invariant="System.Data.Odbc"
      description=".Net Framework Data Provider for Odbc"
      type="System.Data.Odbc.OdbcFactory,
      System.Data, Version=2.0.0.0, Culture=neutral,
      PublicKeyToken=b77a5c561934e089" />
    <add name="OleDb Data Provider" invariant="System.Data.OleDb"
```

```
      description=".Net Framework Data Provider for OleDb"
      type="System.Data.OleDb.OleDbFactory,
      System.Data, Version=2.0.0.0, Culture=neutral,
      PublicKeyToken=b77a5c561934e089" />
    <add name="OracleClient Data Provider" invariant="System.Data.OracleClient"
      description=".Net Framework Data Provider for Oracle"
      type="System.Data.OracleClient.OracleClientFactory, System.Data.OracleClient,
      Version=2.0.0.0, Culture=neutral, PublicKeyToken=b77a5c561934e089" />
    <add name="SqlClient Data Provider" invariant="System.Data.SqlClient"
      description=".Net Framework Data Provider for SqlServer"
      type="System.Data.SqlClient.SqlClientFactory, System.Data,
      Version=2.0.0.0, Culture=neutral, PublicKeyToken=b77a5c561934e089" />
  </DbProviderFactories>
</system.data>
```

■ **Note** If you wish to leverage a similar data provider factory pattern for DMBSs not accounted for in the `machine.config` file, note that the Mono distribution of .NET (see Chapter 1) provides a similar data factory that accounts for numerous open source and commercial data providers.

A Complete Data Provider Factory Example

For a complete example, let's build a console application (named DataProviderFactory) that prints out the first and last names of individuals in the Authors table of a database named Pubs residing within Microsoft SQL Server (as you may know, Pubs is a sample database modeling a fictitious book publishing company).

First, add a reference to the `System.Configuration.dll` assembly and insert an `app.config` file to the current project and define an `<appSettings>` element. Remember that the format of the "official" provider value is the full namespace name for the data provider, rather than the string name of the ad hoc `DataProvider` enumeration used in the MyConnectionFactory example:

```
<configuration>
  <appSettings>
    <!-- Which provider? -->
    <add key="provider" value="System.Data.SqlClient" />
    <!-- Which connection string? -->
    <add key="cnStr" value=
    "Data Source=localhost;uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Pubs"/>
  </appSettings>
</configuration>
```

Now that you have a proper `*.config` file, you can read in the provider and `cnStr` values using the `ConfigurationManager.AppSettings()` method. The provider value will be passed to `DbProviderFactories.GetFactory()` to obtain the data provider–specific factory type. The `cnStr` value will be used to set the `ConnectionString` property of the `DbConnection`-derived type. Assuming you have "used" the `System.Data` and `System.Data.Common` namespaces, update your `Main()` method as follows:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Data Provider Factories *****\n");

    // Get Connection string/provider from *.config.
    string dp =
        ConfigurationManager.AppSettings["provider"];
    string cnStr =
```

```
            ConfigurationManager.AppSettings["cnStr"];

        // Make the factory provider.
        DbProviderFactory df = DbProviderFactories.GetFactory(dp);

        // Now make connection object.
        DbConnection cn = df.CreateConnection();
        Console.WriteLine("Your connection object is a: {0}", cn.GetType().FullName);
        cn.ConnectionString = cnStr;
        cn.Open();

        // Make command object.
        DbCommand cmd = df.CreateCommand();
        Console.WriteLine("Your command object is a: {0}", cmd.GetType().FullName);
        cmd.Connection = cn;
        cmd.CommandText = "Select * From Authors";

        // Print out data with data reader.
        DbDataReader dr =
            cmd.ExecuteReader(CommandBehavior.CloseConnection);
        Console.WriteLine("Your data reader object is a: {0}", dr.GetType().FullName);

        Console.WriteLine("\n***** Authors in Pubs *****");
        while (dr.Read())
            Console.WriteLine("-> {0}, {1}", dr["au_lname"], dr["au_fname"]);
        dr.Close();
}
```

Notice that for diagnostic purposes, you are printing out the fully qualified name of the underlying connection, command, and data reader using reflection services. If you run this application, you will find that the Microsoft SQL Server provider has been used to read data from the Authors table of the Pubs database (see Figure 22-2).

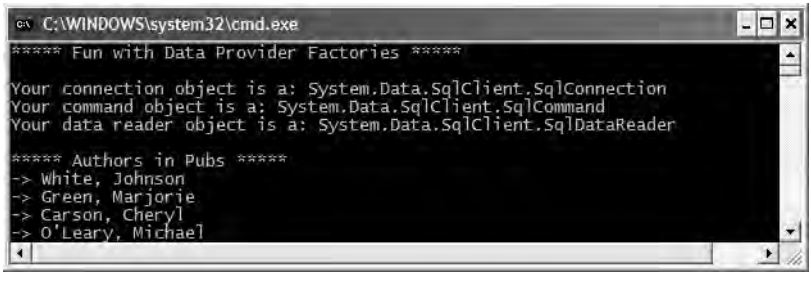

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Fun with Data Provider Factories *****
Your connection object is a: System.Data.SqlClient.SqlConnection
Your command object is a: System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
Your data reader object is a: System.Data.SqlClient.SqlDataReader
***** Authors in Pubs *****
-> White, Johnson
-> Green, Marjorie
-> Carson, Cheryl
-> O'Leary, Michael

Figure 22-2. *Obtaining the SQL Server data provider via the .NET 2.0 data provider factory*

Now, if you change the `*.config` file to specify `System.Data.OleDb` as the data provider (and update your connection string) as follows:

```
<configuration>
  <appSettings>
    <!-- Which provider?  -->
    <add key="provider" value="System.Data.OleDb" />
    <!-- Which connection string? -->
    <add key="cnStr" value=
```

```
    "Provider=SQLOLEDB.1;Data Source=localhost;uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Pubs"/>
  </appSettings>
</configuration>
```

you will find the `System.Data.OleDb` types are used behind the scenes (see Figure 22-3).

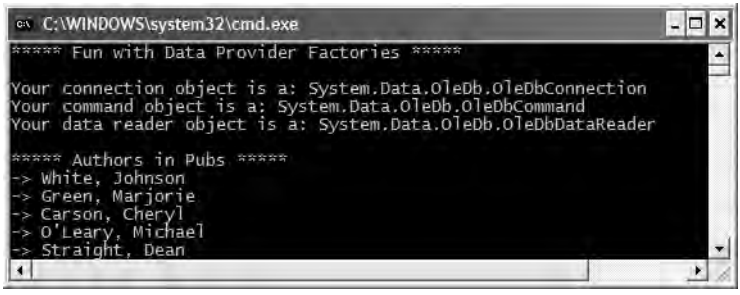

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Fun with Data Provider Factories *****
Your connection object is a: System.Data.OleDb.OleDbConnection
Your command object is a: System.Data.OleDb.OleDbCommand
Your data reader object is a: System.Data.OleDb.OleDbDataReader
***** Authors in Pubs *****
-> White, Johnson
-> Green, Marjorie
-> Carson, Cheryl
-> O'Leary, Michael
-> Straight, Dean

Figure 22-3. *Obtaining the OLE DB data provider via the .NET 2.0 data provider factory*

Of course, based on your experience with ADO.NET, you may be a bit unsure exactly what the connection, command, and data reader objects are actually doing. Don't sweat the details for the time being (quite a few pages remain in this chapter, after all!). At this point, just understand that under .NET 2.0, it is possible to build a single code base that can consume various data providers in a declarative manner.

Although this is a very powerful model, you must make sure that the code base does indeed make use only of types and methods that are common to all providers. Therefore, when authoring your code base, you will be limited to the members exposed by `DbConnection`, `DbCommand`, and the other types of the `System.Data.Common` namespace. Given this, you may find that this "generalized" approach will prevent you from directly accessing some of the bells and whistles of a particular DBMS (so be sure to test your code!).

The <connectionStrings> Element

As of .NET 2.0, application configuration files may define a new element named `<connectionStrings>`. Within this element, you are able to define any number of name/value pairs that can be programmatically read into memory using the `ConfigurationManager.ConnectionStrings` indexer. The chief advantage of this approach (rather than using the `<appSettings>` element and the `ConfigurationManager.AppSettings` indexer) is that you can define multiple connection strings for a single application in a consistent manner.

To illustrate, update your current `app.config` file as follows (note that each connection string is documented using the `name` and `connectionString` attributes rather than the `key` and `value` attributes as found in `<appSettings>`):

```
<configuration>
  <appSettings>
  <!-- Which provider?  -->
    <add key="provider" value="System.Data.SqlClient" />
  </appSettings>
  <connectionStrings>
    <add name ="SqlProviderPubs"  connectionString =
    "Data Source=localhost;uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Pubs"/>
```

```
    <add name ="OleDbProviderPubs"  connectionString =
    " Provider=SQLOLEDB.1;Data Source=localhost;uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Pubs"/>
    </connectionStrings>
</configuration>
```

With this, you can now update your `Main()` method as so:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Data Provider Factories *****\n");
    string dp =
        ConfigurationManager.AppSettings["provider"];
    string cnStr =
        ConfigurationManager.ConnectionStrings["SqlProviderPubs"].ConnectionString;
...
}
```

At this point, you should be clear on how to interact with the .NET 2.0 data provider factory (and the new `<connectionStrings>` element).

■ **Note** Now that you understand the role of ADO.NET data provider factories, the remaining examples in this chapter will make explicit use of the types within `System.Data.SqlClient` and hard-coded connection strings, just to keep focused on the task at hand.

■ **Source Code** The DataProviderFactory project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Installing the Cars Database

Now that you understand the basic properties of a .NET data provider, you can begin to dive into the specifics of coding with ADO.NET. As mentioned earlier, the examples in this chapter will make use of Microsoft SQL Server. In keeping with the automotive theme used throughout this text, I have included a sample Cars database that contains three interrelated tables named Inventory, Orders, and Customers.

■ **Note** If you do not have a copy of Microsoft SQL Server, you can download a (free) copy of Microsoft SQL Server 2005 Express Edition (`http://lab.msdn.microsoft.com/express`). While this tool does not have all the bells and whistles of the full version of Microsoft SQL Server, it will allow you to host the provided Cars database. Do be aware, however, that this chapter was written with Microsoft SQL Server in mind, so be sure to consult the provided SQL Server 2005 Express Edition documentation.

To install the Cars database on your machine, begin by opening the Query Analyzer utility that ships with SQL Server. Next, connect to your machine and open the provided `Cars.sql` file. Before you run the script, make sure that the path listed in the SQL file points to your installation of Microsoft SQL Server. Edit the following lines (in bold) as necessary:

```
CREATE DATABASE [Cars]  ON (NAME = N'Cars_Data', FILENAME
=N' C:\Program Files\Microsoft SQL Server\MSSQL\Data\Cars_Data.MDF' ,
SIZE = 2, FILEGROWTH = 10%)
```

```
LOG ON (NAME = N'Cars_Log', FILENAME
= N' C:\Program Files\Microsoft SQL Server\MSSQL\Data\Cars_Log.LDF' ,
SIZE = 1, FILEGROWTH = 10%)
GO
```

Now run the script. Once you do, open up SQL Server Enterprise Manager. You should see three interrelated tables (with some sample data to boot) and a single stored procedure. Figure 22-4 shows the tables that populate the Cars database.

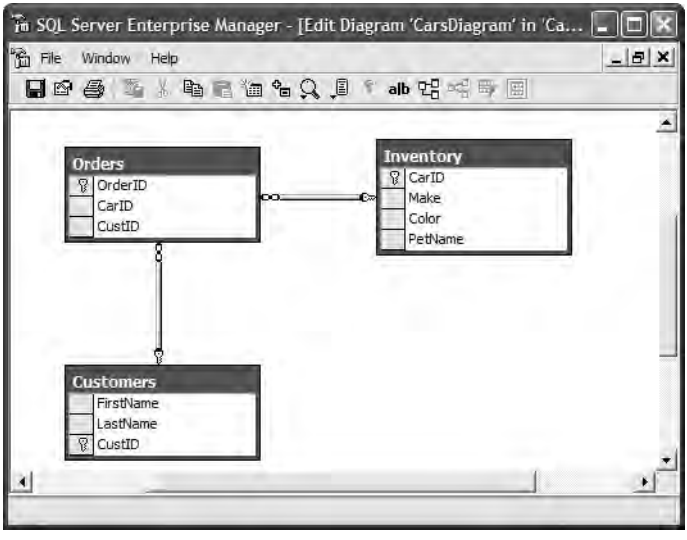


Figure 22-4. *The sample Cars database*

Connecting to the Cars Database from Visual Studio 2005

Now that you have the Cars database installed, you may wish to create a data connection to the database from within Visual Studio 2005. This will allow you to view and edit the various database objects from within the IDE. To do so, open the Server Explorer window using the View menu. Next, right-click the Data Connections node and select Add Connection from the context menu. From the resulting dialog box, select Microsoft SQL Server as the data source. In the next dialog box, select your machine name (or simply *localhost*) from the "Server name" drop-down list and specify the correct logon information. Finally, choose the Cars database from the "Select or enter a database name" drop-down list (see Figure 22-5).

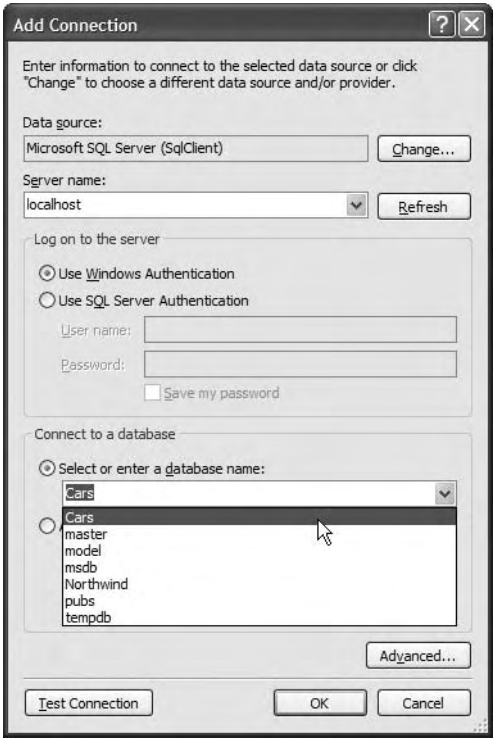


Figure 22-5. *Connecting to the Cars database from Visual Studio 2005*

Once you've finished, you should now see a node for Cars under Data Connections. Notice that you can pull up the records for a given data table simply by right-clicking and selecting Show Table Data (see Figure 22-6).

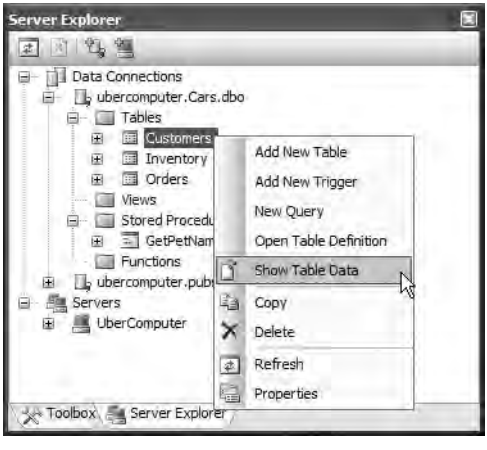


Figure 22-6. *Viewing table data*

Understanding the Connected Layer of ADO.NET

Recall that the *connected layer* of ADO.NET allows you to interact with a database using the connection, command, and data reader objects of your data provider. Although you have already made use of these objects in the previous DataProviderFactory example, let's walk through the process once again in detail. When you wish to connect to a database and read the records using a data reader object, you need to perform the following steps:

1. Allocate, configure, and open your connection object.
2. Allocate and configure a command object, specifying the connection object as a constructor argument or via the `Connection` property.
3. Call `ExecuteReader()` on the configured command object.
4. Process each record using the `Read()` method of the data reader.

To get the ball rolling, create a brand-new console application named CarsDataReader. The goal is to open a connection (via the `SqlConnection` object) and submit a SQL query (via the `SqlCommand` object) to obtain all records within the Inventory table of the Cars database. At this point, you will use a `SqlDataReader` to print out the results using the type indexer. Here is the complete code within `Main()`, with analysis to follow:

```
class Program
{
  static void Main(string[] args)
  {
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Data Readers *****\n");

    // Create an open a connection.
    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
    cn.ConnectionString =
      "uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars; Data Source=(local)";
    cn.Open();

    // Create a SQL command object.
    string strSQL = "Select * From Inventory";
    SqlCommand myCommand = new SqlCommand(strSQL, cn);

    // Obtain a data reader a la ExecuteReader().
    SqlDataReader myDataReader;
    myDataReader = myCommand.ExecuteReader(CommandBehavior.CloseConnection);

    // Loop over the results.
    while (myDataReader.Read())
    {
      Console.WriteLine("-> Make: {0}, PetName: {1}, Color: {2}.",
        myDataReader["Make"].ToString().Trim(),
        myDataReader["PetName"].ToString().Trim(),
        myDataReader["Color"].ToString().Trim());
    }

    // Because we specified CommandBehavior.CloseConnection, we
    // don't need to explicitly call Close() on the connection.
    myDataReader.Close();
  }
}
```

Working with Connection Objects

The first step to take when working with a data provider is to establish a session with the data source using the connection object (which, as you recall, derives from `DbConnection`). .NET connection types are provided with a formatted *connection string*, which contains a number of name/value pairs separated by semicolons. This information is used to identify the name of the machine you wish to connect to, required security settings, the name of the database on that machine, and other data provider–specific information.

As you can infer from the preceding code, the Initial Catalog name refers to the database you are attempting to establish a session with (Pubs, Northwind, Cars, etc.). The Data Source name identifies the name of the machine that maintains the database (for simplicity, I have assumed no specific password is required for local system administrators).

■ **Note** Look up the `ConnectionString` property of your data provider's connection object in the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation to learn about each name/value pair for your specific DBMS.

Once your construction string has been established, a call to `Open()` establishes your connection with the DBMS. In addition to the `ConnectionString`, `Open()`, and `Close()` members, a connection object provides a number of members that let you configure attritional settings regarding your connection, such as timeout settings and transactional information. Table 22-6 lists some (but not all) members of the `DbConnection` base class.

Table 22-6. *Members of the* `DbConnection` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`BeginTransaction()`	This method is used to begin a database transaction.
`ChangeDatabase()`	This method changes the database on an open connection.
`ConnectionTimeout`	This read-only property returns the amount of time to wait while establishing a connection before terminating and generating an error (the default value is 15 seconds). If you wish to change the default, specify a "Connect Timeout" segment in the connection string (e.g., `Connect Timeout=30`).
`Database`	This property gets the name of the database maintained by the connection object.
`DataSource`	This property gets the location of the database maintained by the connection object.
`GetSchema()`	This method returns a `DataSet` that contains schema information from the data source.
`State`	This property sets the current state of the connection, represented by the `ConnectionState` enumeration.

As you can see, the properties of the `DbConnection` type are typically read-only in nature and are only useful when you wish to obtain the characteristics of a connection at runtime. When you wish to override default settings, you must alter the construction string itself. For example, the connection string sets the connection timeout setting from 15 seconds to 30 seconds (via the `Connect Timeout` segment of the connection string):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
```

```
    cn.ConnectionString =
        "uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;" +
        "Data Source=(local);Connect Timeout=30";
    cn.Open();

    // New helper function (see below).
    ShowConnectionStatus(cn);
...
}
```

In the preceding code, notice you have now passed your connection object as a parameter to a new static helper method in the `Program` class named `ShowConnectionStatus()`, implemented as so:

```
static void ShowConnectionStatus(DbConnection cn)
{
    // Show various stats about current connection object.
    Console.WriteLine("***** Info about your connection *****");
    Console.WriteLine("Database location: {0}", cn.DataSource);
    Console.WriteLine("Database name: {0}", cn.Database);
    Console.WriteLine("Timeout: {0}", cn.ConnectionTimeout);
    Console.WriteLine("Connection state: {0}\n", cn.State.ToString());
}
```

While most of these properties are self-explanatory, the `State` property is worth special mention. Although this property may be assigned any value of the `ConnectionState` enumeration

```
public enum System.Data.ConnectionState
{
    Broken, Closed,
    Connecting, Executing,
    Fetching, Open
}
```

the only valid `ConnectionState` values are `ConnectionState.Open` and `ConnectionState.Closed` (the remaining members of this enum are reserved for future use). Also, understand that it is always safe to close a connection whose connection state is currently `ConnectionState.Closed`.

Working with .NET 2.0 ConnectionStringBuilders

Working with connection strings programmatically can be a bit clunky, given that they are often represented as string literals, which are difficult to maintain and error-prone at best. Under .NET 2.0, the Microsoft-supplied ADO.NET data providers now support *connection string builder objects*, which allow you to establish the name/value pairs using strongly typed properties. Consider the following update to the current `Main()` method:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    // Create a connection string via the builder object.
    SqlConnectionStringBuilder cnStrBuilder =
        new SqlConnectionStringBuilder();
    cnStrBuilder.UserID = "sa";
    cnStrBuilder.Password = "";
    cnStrBuilder.InitialCatalog = "Cars";
    cnStrBuilder.DataSource = "(local)";
    cnStrBuilder.ConnectTimeout = 30;

    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
    cn.ConnectionString = cnStrBuilder.ConnectionString;
    cn.Open();
```

```
    ShowConnectionStatus(cn);
...
}
```

In this iteration, you create an instance of `SqlConnectionStringBuilder`, set the properties accordingly, and obtain the internal string via the `ConnectionString` property. Also note that you make use of the default constructor of the type. If you so choose, you can also create an instance of your data provider's connection string builder object by passing in an existing connection string as a starting point (which can be helpful when you are reading these values dynamically from an `app.config` file). Once you have hydrated the object with the initial string data, you can change specific name/value pairs using the related properties, for example:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Data Readers *****\n");

    // Assume you really obtained cnStr from a *.config file.
    string cnStr = "uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;" +
        "Data Source=(local);Connect Timeout=30";

    SqlConnectionStringBuilder cnStrBuilder =
        new SqlConnectionStringBuilder(cnStr);
    cnStrBuilder.UserID = "sa";
    cnStrBuilder.Password = "";
    cnStrBuilder.InitialCatalog = "Cars";
    cnStrBuilder.DataSource = "(local)";

    // Change timeout value.
    cnStrBuilder.ConnectTimeout = 5;
...
}
```

Working with Command Objects

Now that you better understand the role of the connection object, the next order of business is to check out how to submit SQL queries to the database in question. The `SqlCommand` type (which derives from `DbCommand`) is an OO representation of a SQL query, table name, or stored procedure. The type of command is specified using the `CommandType` property, which may take any value from the `CommandType` enum:

```
public enum System.Data.CommandType
{
    StoredProcedure,
    TableDirect,
    Text    // Default value.
}
```

When creating a command object, you may establish the SQL query as a constructor parameter or directly via the `CommandText` property. Also when you are creating a command object, you need to specify the connection to be used. Again, you may do so as a constructor parameter or via the `Connection` property:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
...
    // Create command object via ctor args.
```

```
    string strSQL = "Select * From Inventory";
    SqlCommand myCommand = new SqlCommand(strSQL, cn);

    // Create another command object via properties.
    SqlCommand testCommand = new SqlCommand();
    testCommand.Connection = cn;
    testCommand.CommandText = strSQL;
...
}
```

Realize that at this point, you have not literally submitted the SQL query to the Cars database, but rather prepped the state of the command type for future use. Table 22-7 highlights some additional members of the `DbCommand` type.

Table 22-7. *Members of the* `DbCommand` *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
`CommandTimeout`	Gets or sets the time to wait while executing the command before terminating the attempt and generating an error. The default is 30 seconds.
`Connection`	Gets or sets the `DbConnection` used by this instance of the `DbCommand`.
`Parameters`	Gets the collection of `DbParameter` types used for a parameterized query.
`Cancel()`	Cancels the execution of a command.
`ExecuteReader()`	Returns the data provider's `DbDataReader` object, which provides forward-only, read-only access to the underlying data.
`ExecuteNonQuery()`	Issues the command text to the data store.
`ExecuteScalar()`	A lightweight version of the `ExecuteNonQuery()` method, designed specifically for singleton queries (such as obtaining a record count).
`ExecuteXmlReader()`	Microsoft SQL Server (2000 and higher) is capable of returning result sets as XML. As you might suspect, this method returns a `System.Xml.XmlReader` that allows you to process the incoming stream of XML.
`Prepare()`	Creates a prepared (or compiled) version of the command on the data source. As you may know, a *prepared query* executes slightly faster and is useful when you wish to execute the same query multiple times.

■ **Note** As illustrated later in this chapter, as of .NET 2.0, the `SqlCommand` object has been updated with additional members that facilitate asynchronous database interactions.

Working with Data Readers

Once you have established the active connection and SQL command, the next step is to submit the query to the data source. As you might guess, you have a number of ways to do so. The `DbDataReader` type (which implements `IDataReader`) is the simplest and fastest way to obtain information from a data store. Recall that data readers represent a read-only, forward-only stream of data returned one record at a time. Given this, it should stand to reason that data readers are useful only when submitting SQL selection statements to the underlying data store.

Data readers are useful when you need to iterate over large amounts of data very quickly and have no need to maintain an in-memory representation. For example, if you request 20,000 records from a table to store in a text file, it would be rather memory-intensive to hold this information in

a DataSet. A better approach is to create a data reader that spins over each record as rapidly as possible. Be aware, however, that data reader objects (unlike data adapter objects, which you'll examine later) maintain an open connection to their data source until you explicitly close the session.

Data reader objects are obtained from the command object via a call to ExecuteReader(). When invoking this method, you may optionally instruct the reader to automatically close down the related connection object by specifying CommandBehavior.CloseConnection.

The following use of the data reader leverages the Read() method to determine when you have reached the end of your records (via a false return value). For each incoming record, you are making use of the type indexer to print out the make, pet name, and color of each automobile. Also note that you call Close() as soon as you are finished processing the records, to free up the connection object:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Obtain a data reader a la ExecuteReader().
    SqlDataReader myDataReader;
    myDataReader = myCommand.ExecuteReader(CommandBehavior.CloseConnection);

    // Loop over the results.
    while (myDataReader.Read())
    {
        Console.WriteLine("-> Make: {0}, PetName: {1}, Color: {2}.",
            myDataReader["Make"].ToString().Trim(),
            myDataReader["PetName"].ToString().Trim(),
            myDataReader["Color"].ToString().Trim());
    }
    myDataReader.Close();
    ShowConnectionStatus(cn);
}
```

■ **Note** The trimming of the string data shown here is only used to remove trailing blank spaces in the database entries; it is not directly related to ADO.NET!

The indexer of a data reader object has been overloaded to take either a string (representing the name of the column) or an integer (representing the column's ordinal position). Thus, you could clean up the current reader logic (and avoid hard-coded string names) with the following update (note the use of the FieldCount property):

```
while (myDataReader.Read())
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Record *****");
    for (int i = 0; i < myDataReader.FieldCount; i++)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("{0} = {1} ",
            myDataReader.GetName(i),
            myDataReader.GetValue(i).ToString().Trim());
    }
    Console.WriteLine();
}
```

If you compile and run your project, you should be presented with a list of all automobiles in the Inventory table of the Cars database (see Figure 22-7).


C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Fun with Data Readers *****
***** Info about your connection *****
Database location: (local)
Database name: Cars
Timeout: 5
Connection state: Open
CarID = 0 Make = BMW Color = Tan PetName = Daisy
CarID = 1 Make = BMW Color = Green PetName = Mary
CarID = 2 Make = Viper Color = Red PetName = Zippy
CarID = 4 Make = Colt Color = Rust PetName = Rusty Burger
CarID = 8 Make = BMW Color = Black PetName = Black
***** Info about your connection *****
Database location: (local)
Database name: Cars
Timeout: 5
Connection state: Closed
Press any key to continue . . .

Figure 22-7. *Fun with data reader objects*

Obtaining Multiple Result Sets Using a Data Reader

Data reader objects are able to obtain multiple result sets from a single command object. For example, if you are interested in obtaining all rows from the Inventory table as well as all rows from the Customers table, you are able to specify both SQL select statements using a semicolon delimiter:

```
string theSQL = "Select * From Inventory;Select * from Customers";
```

Once you obtain the data reader, you are able to iterate over each result set via the `NextResult()` method. Do be aware that you are always returned the first result set automatically. Thus, if you wish to read over the rows of each table, you will be able to build the following iteration construct:

```
do
{
     while(myDataReader.Read())
     {
          // Read the info of the current result set.
     }
}while(myDataReader.NextResult());
```

So, at this point, you should be more aware of the functionality data reader objects bring to the table. While these objects provide additional bits of functionality than I have shown here (such as the ability to execute scalars and single-row queries), I'll leave it to interested readers to consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for complete details.

■ **Source Code** The CarsDataReader project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Modifying Tables Using Command Objects

As you have just seen, the `ExecuteReader()` method extracts a data reader object that allows you to examine the results of a SQL Select statement using a forward-only, read-only flow of information. However, when you wish to submit SQL commands that result in the modification of a given table, you will call the `ExecuteNonQuery()` method of your command object. This single method will perform inserts, updates, and deletes based on the format of your command text.

To illustrate how to modify an existing database using nothing more than a call to `ExecuteNonQuery()`, you will now build a new console application (CarsInventoryUpdater) that allows the caller to modify the Inventory table of the Cars database. Like in other examples in this text, the `Main()` method is responsible for prompting the user for a specific course of action and executing that request via a switch statement. This program will allow the user to enter the following commands:

- **I**: Inserts a new record into the Inventory table
- **U**: Updates an existing record in the Inventory table
- **D**: Deletes an existing record from the Inventory table
- **L**: Displays the current inventory using a data reader
- **S**: Shows these options to the user
- **Q**: Quits the program

Each possible option is handled by a unique static method within the `Program` class. For the purpose of completion, here is the implementation of `Main()`, which I assume requires no further comment:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Car Inventory Updater *****");
    bool userDone = false;
    string userCommand = "";

    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
    cn.ConnectionString =
        "uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;" +
        "Data Source=(local);Connect Timeout=30";
    cn.Open();

    ShowInstructions();
    do
    {
        Console.Write("Please enter your command: ");
        userCommand = Console.ReadLine();
        Console.WriteLine();
        switch (userCommand.ToUpper())
        {
            case "I":
                InsertNewCar(cn);
                break;
            case "U":
                UpdateCarPetName(cn);
                break;
            case "D":
                DeleteCar(cn);
                break;
            case "L":
                ListInventory(cn);
                break;
            case "S":
                ShowInstructions();
                break;
            case "Q":
                userDone = true;
                break;
```

```
            default:
                Console.WriteLine("Bad data!  Try again");
                break;
        }
    } while (!userDone);
    cn.Close();
}
```

The `ShowInstructions()` method does what you would expect:

```
private static void ShowInstructions()
{
    Console.WriteLine();
    Console.WriteLine("I: Inserts a new car.");
    Console.WriteLine("U: Updated an existing car.");
    Console.WriteLine("D: Deletes an existing car.");
    Console.WriteLine("L: List current inventory.");
    Console.WriteLine("S: Show these instructions.");
    Console.WriteLine("Q: Quits program.");
}
```

As mentioned, `ListInventory()` prints out the current rows of the Inventory table using a data reader object (the code is identical to the previous CarsDataReader example):

```
private static void ListInventory(SqlConnection cn)
{
    string strSQL = "Select * From Inventory";
    SqlCommand myCommand = new SqlCommand(strSQL, cn);
    SqlDataReader myDataReader;
    myDataReader = myCommand.ExecuteReader();
    while (myDataReader.Read())
    {
        for (int i = 0; i < myDataReader.FieldCount; i++)
        {
            Console.Write("{0} = {1} ",
                myDataReader.GetName(i),
                myDataReader.GetValue(i).ToString().Trim());
        }
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
    myDataReader.Close();
}
```

Now that the CUI is in place, let's move on to the good stuff.

Inserting New Records

Inserting a new record into the Inventory table is as simple as formatting the SQL insert statement (based on user input) and calling `ExecuteNonQuery()`. To keep the code crisp, I have deleted the necessary `try/catch` logic that is present in the code download for this text:

```
private static void InsertNewCar(SqlConnection cn)
{
    // Gather info about new car.
    Console.Write("Enter CarID: ");
    int newCarID =  int.Parse(Console.ReadLine());
    Console.Write("Enter Make: ");
    string newCarMake = Console.ReadLine();
    Console.Write("Enter Color: ");
```

```
    string newCarColor = Console.ReadLine();
    Console.Write("Enter PetName: ");
    string newCarPetName = Console.ReadLine();

    // Format and execute SQL statement.
    string sql = string.Format("Insert Into Inventory" +
        "(CarID, Make, Color, PetName) Values" +
        "('{0}', '{1}', '{2}', '{3}')", newCarID, newCarMake,
        newCarColor, newCarPetName);
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cn);
    cmd.ExecuteNonQuery();
}
```

■ **Note** As you may know, building a SQL statement using string concatenation can be risky from a security point of view (think: SQL injection attacks). While I use this approach during this chapter for purposes of brevity, the preferred way to build command text is using a parameterized query, which I describe shortly.

Deleting Existing Records

Deleting an existing record is just as simple as inserting a new record. Unlike the code listing for `InsertNewCar()`, I will show one important `try/catch` scope that handles the possibility of attempting to delete a car that is currently on order for an individual in the Customers table (which will be used later in this chapter):

```
private static void DeleteCar(SqlConnection cn)
{
    // Get ID of car to delete, then do so.
    Console.Write("Enter CarID of car to delete: ");
    int carToDelete = int.Parse(Console.ReadLine());
    string sql = string.Format("Delete from Inventory where CarID = '{0}'",
        carToDelete);
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cn);
    try { cmd.ExecuteNonQuery(); }
    catch { Console.WriteLine("Sorry!  That car is on order!"); }
}
```

Updating Existing Records

If you followed the code behind `DeleteCar()` and `InsertNewCar()`, then `UpdateCarPetName()` is a no-brainer (again, `try/catch` logic has been removed for clarity):

```
private static void UpdateCarPetName(SqlConnection cn)
{
    // Get ID of car to modify and new pet name.
    Console.Write("Enter CarID of car to modify: ");
    string newPetName = "";
    int carToUpdate = carToUpdate = int.Parse(Console.ReadLine());
    Console.Write("Enter new pet name: ");
    newPetName = Console.ReadLine();

    // Now update record.
    string sql =
        string.Format("Update Inventory Set PetName = '{0}' Where CarID = '{1}'",
```

```
            newPetName, carToUpdate);
        SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cn);
        cmd.ExecuteNonQuery();
    }
```

With this, our application is finished. Figure 22-8 shows a test run.


C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Car Inventory Updater *****
I: Inserts a new car.
U: Updated an existing car.
D: Deletes an existing car.
L: List current inventory.
S: Show these instructions.
Q: Quits program.
Please enter your command: u
Enter CarID of car to modify: 8
Enter new pet name: Killer
Please enter your command: l
CarID = 0 Make = BMW Color = Tan PetName = Daisy
CarID = 1 Make = BMW Color = Green PetName = Mary
CarID = 2 Make = Viper Color = Red PetName = Zippy
CarID = 4 Make = Colt Color = Rust PetName = Rusty Burger
CarID = 8 Make = BMW Color = Black PetName = Killer
Please enter your command:

Figure 22-8. *Inserting, updating, and deleting records via command objects*

Working with Parameterized Command Objects

The previous insert, update, and delete logic works as expected; however, note that each of your SQL queries is represented using hard-coded string literals. As you may know, a *parameterized query* can be used to treat SQL parameters as objects, rather than a simple blob of text. Typically, parameterized queries execute much faster than a literal SQL string, in that they are parsed exactly once (rather than each time the SQL string is assigned to the `CommandText` property). As well, parameterized queries also help protect against SQL injection attacks (a well-known data access security issue).

ADO.NET command objects maintain a collection of discrete parameter types. By default this collection is empty, but you are free to insert any number of parameter objects that map to a "placeholder parameter" in the SQL query. When you wish to associate a parameter within a SQL query to a member in the command object's parameters collection, prefix the SQL text parameter with an at (@) symbol (at least when using Microsoft SQL Server; not all DBMSs support this notation).

Specifying Parameters Using the DbParameter Type

Before you build a parameterized query, let's get to know the `DbParameter` type (which is the base class to a provider's specific parameter object). This class maintains a number of properties that allow you to configure the name, size, and data type of the parameter, as well as other characteristics such as the parameter's direction of travel. Table 22-8 describes some key properties of the `DbParameter` type.

Table 22-8. *Key Members of the* `DbParameter` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`DbType`	Gets or sets the native data type from the data source, represented as a CLR data type
`Direction`	Gets or sets whether the parameter is input-only, output-only, bidirectional, or a return value parameter
`IsNullable`	Gets or sets whether the parameter accepts null values
`ParameterName`	Gets or sets the name of the `DbParameter`
`Size`	Gets or sets the maximum parameter size of the data
`Value`	Gets or sets the value of the parameter

To illustrate, let's rework the previous `InsertNewCar()` method to make use of parameter objects. Here is the relevant code:

```
private static void InsertNewCar(SqlConnection cn)
{
...
    // Note the 'placeholders' in the SQL query.
    string sql = string.Format("Insert Into Inventory" +
        "(CarID, Make, Color, PetName) Values" +
        "(@CarID, @Make, @Color, @PetName)");

    // Fill params collection.
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cn);
    SqlParameter param = new SqlParameter();
    param.ParameterName = "@CarID";
    param.Value = newCarID;
    param.SqlDbType = SqlDbType.Int;
    cmd.Parameters.Add(param);

    param = new SqlParameter();
    param.ParameterName = "@Make";
    param.Value = newCarMake;
    param.SqlDbType = SqlDbType.Char;
    param.Size = 20;
    cmd.Parameters.Add(param);

    param = new SqlParameter();
    param.ParameterName = "@Color";
    param.Value = newCarColor;
    param.SqlDbType = SqlDbType.Char;
    param.Size = 20;
    cmd.Parameters.Add(param);

    param = new SqlParameter();
    param.ParameterName = "@PetName";
    param.Value = newCarPetName;
    param.SqlDbType = SqlDbType.Char;
    param.Size = 20;
    cmd.Parameters.Add(param);
    cmd.ExecuteNonQuery();
}
```

While building a parameterized query requires a larger amount of code, the end result is a more convenient way to tweak SQL statements programmatically as well as better overall performance. While you are free to make use of this technique whenever a SQL query is involved, parameterized queries are most helpful when you wish to trigger a stored procedure.

■ **Note** Here, I made use of various properties to establish a parameter object. Do know, however, that parameter objects support a number of overloaded constructors that allow you to set the values of various properties (which will result in a more compact code base).

Executing a Stored Procedure Using DbCommand

A *stored procedure* is a named block of SQL code stored in the database. Stored procedures can be constructed to return a set of rows or scalar data types and may take any number of optional parameters. The end result is a unit of work that behaves like a typical function, with the obvious difference of being located on a data store rather than a binary business object.

■ **Note** Although I don't cover this topic in this chapter, it is worth pointing out that the newest version of Microsoft SQL Server (2005) is a CLR host! Therefore, stored procedures (and other database atoms) can be authored using managed languages (such as C#) rather than traditional SQL. Consult `http://www.microsoft.com/sql/2005` for further details.

To illustrate the process, let's add a new option to the CarInventoryUpdate program that allows the caller to look up a car's pet name via the `GetPetName` stored procedure. This database object was established when you installed the Cars database and looks like this:

```
CREATE PROCEDURE GetPetName
@carID int,
@petName char(20) output
AS
SELECT @petName = PetName from Inventory where CarID = @carID
```

First, update the current switch statement in `Main()` to handle a new case for "P" that calls a new helper function named `LookUpPetName()` that takes a `SqlConnection` parameter and returns `void`. Update your `ShowInstructions()` method to account for this new option.

When you wish to execute a stored procedure, you begin as always by creating a new connection object, configuring your connection string, and opening the session. However, when you create your command object, the `CommandText` property is set to the name of the stored procedure (rather than a SQL query). As well, you must be sure to set the `CommandType` property to `CommandType.StoredProcedure` (the default is `CommandType.Text`).

Given that this stored procedure has one input and one output parameter, your goal is to build a command object that contains two `SqlParameter` objects within its parameter collection:

```
private static void LookUpPetName(SqlConnection cn)
{
    // Get the CarID.
    Console.Write("Enter CarID: ");
    int carID = int.Parse(Console.ReadLine());

    // Establish name of stored proc.
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand("GetPetName", cn);
    cmd.CommandType = CommandType.StoredProcedure;
```

```
    // Input param.
    SqlParameter param = new SqlParameter();
    param.ParameterName = "@carID";
    param.SqlDbType = SqlDbType.Int;
    param.Value = carID;
    param.Direction = ParameterDirection.Input;
    cmd.Parameters.Add(param);

    // Output param.
    param = new SqlParameter();
    param.ParameterName = "@petName";
    param.SqlDbType = SqlDbType.Char;
    param.Size = 20;
    param.Direction = ParameterDirection.Output;
    cmd.Parameters.Add(param);

    // Execute the stored proc.
    cmd.ExecuteNonQuery();

    // Print output param.
    Console.WriteLine("Pet name for car {0} is {1}",
        carID, cmd.Parameters["@petName"].Value);
}
```

Notice that the `Direction` property of the parameter object allows you to specify input and output parameters. Once the stored procedure completes via a call to `ExecuteNonQuery()`, you are able to obtain the value of the output parameter by investigating the command object's parameter collection. Figure 22-9 shows one possible test run.

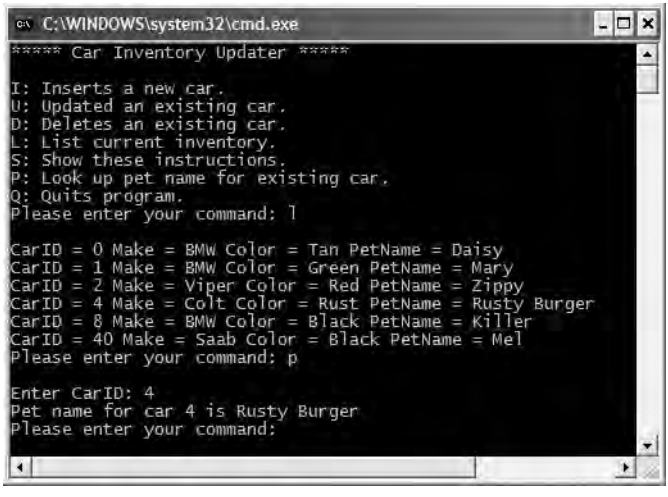

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Car Inventory Updater *****
I: Inserts a new car.
U: Updated an existing car.
D: Deletes an existing car.
L: List current inventory.
S: Show these instructions.
P: Look up pet name for existing car.
Q: Quits program.
Please enter your command: l
CarID = 0 Make = BMW Color = Tan PetName = Daisy
CarID = 1 Make = BMW Color = Green PetName = Mary
CarID = 2 Make = Viper Color = Red PetName = Zippy
CarID = 4 Make = Colt Color = Rust PetName = Rusty Burger
CarID = 8 Make = BMW Color = Black PetName = Killer
CarID = 40 Make = Saab Color = Black PetName = Mel
Please enter your command: p
Enter CarID: 4
Pet name for car 4 is Rusty Burger
Please enter your command:

Figure 22-9. *Triggering a stored proceedure*

Source Code The CarsInventoryUpdater application is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Asynchronous Data Access Under .NET 2.0

As of .NET 2.0, the SQL data provider (represented by the `System.Data.SqlClient` namespace) has been enhanced to support asynchronous database interactions via the following new members of `SqlCommand`:

- `BeginExecuteReader()/EndExecuteReader()`
- `BeginExecuteNonQuery()/EndExecuteNonQuery()`
- `BeginExecuteXmlReader()/EndExecuteXmlReader()`

Given your work in Chapter 14, the naming convention of these method pairs may ring a bell. Recall that the .NET asynchronous delegate pattern makes use of a "begin" method to execute a task on a secondary thread, whereas the "end" method can be used to obtain the result of the asynchronous invocation using the members of `IAsyncResult` and the optional `AsyncCallback` delegate. Because the process of working with asynchronous commands is modeled after the standard delegate patterns, a simple example should suffice (so be sure to consult Chapter 14 for full details of asynchronous delegates).

Assume you wish to select the records from the Inventory table on a secondary thread of execution using a data reader object. Here is the complete `Main()` method, with analysis to follow:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with ASNYC Data Readers *****\n");

    // Create an open a connection that is async-aware.
    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
    cn.ConnectionString =
        "uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;" +
        "Asynchronous Processing=true;Data Source=(local)";
    cn.Open();

    // Create a SQL command object that waits for approx 2 seconds.
    string strSQL = "WaitFor Delay '00:00:02';Select * From Inventory";
    SqlCommand myCommand = new SqlCommand(strSQL, cn);

    // Execute the reader on a second thread.
    IAsyncResult itfAsynch;
    itfAsynch = myCommand.BeginExecuteReader(CommandBehavior.CloseConnection);

    // Do something while other thread works.
    while (!itfAsynch.IsCompleted)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Working on main thread...");
        Thread.Sleep(1000);
    }
    Console.WriteLine();

    // All done!  Get reader and loop over results.
    SqlDataReader myDataReader = myCommand.EndExecuteReader(itfAsynch);
    while (myDataReader.Read())
    {
        Console.WriteLine("-> Make: {0}, PetName: {1}, Color: {2}.",
            myDataReader["Make"].ToString().Trim(),
            myDataReader["PetName"].ToString().Trim(),
            myDataReader["Color"].ToString().Trim());
```

```
    }
    myDataReader.Close();
}
```

The first point of interest is the fact that you need to enable asynchronous activity using the new `Asynchronous Processing` segment of the connection string. Also note that you have padded into the command text of your `SqlCommand` object a new `WaitFor Delay` segment simply to simulate a long-running database interaction.

Beyond these points, notice that the call to `BeginExecuteDataReader()` returns the expected `IasyncResult`-compatible type, which is used to synchronize the calling thread (via the `IsCompleted` property) as well as obtain the `SqlDataReader` once the query has finished executing.

■ **Source Code** The AsyncCmdObject application is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Understanding the Disconnected Layer of ADO.NET

As you have seen, working with the connected layer allows you to interact with a database using connection, command, and data reader objects. With this small handful of types, you are able to select, insert, update, and delete records to your heart's content (as well as trigger stored procedures). In reality, however, you have seen only half of the ADO.NET story. Recall that the ADO.NET object model can be used in a *disconnected* manner.

When you work with the disconnected layer of ADO.NET, you will still make use of connection and command objects. In addition, you will leverage a specific object named a *data adapter* (which extends the abstract `DbDataAdapter`) to fetch and update data. Unlike the connected layer, data obtained via a data adapter is not processed using data reader objects. Rather, data adapter objects make use of `DataSet` objects to move data between the caller and data source. The `DataSet` type is a container for any number of `DataTable` objects, each of which contains a collection of `DataRow` and `DataColumn` objects.

The data adapter object of your data provider handles the database connection automatically. In an attempt to increase scalability, data adapters keep the connection open for the shortest possible amount of time. Once the caller receives the `DataSet` object, he is completely disconnected from the DBMS and left with a local copy of the remote data. The caller is free to insert, delete, or update rows from a given `DataTable`, but the physical database is not updated until the caller explicitly passes the `DataSet` to the data adapter for updating. In a nutshell, `DataSet`s allow the clients to pretend they are indeed always connected, when in fact they are operating on an in-memory database (see Figure 22-10).

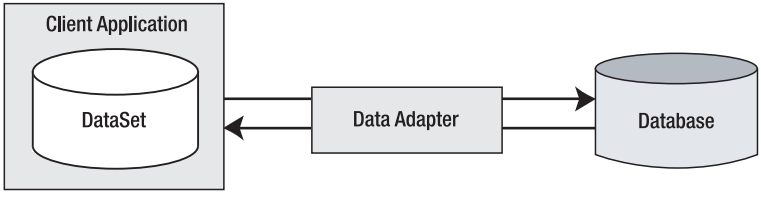


Figure 22-10. *Data adapter objects move* `DataSet`*s to and from the client tier.*

Given that the centerpiece of the disconnected layer is the `DataSet` type, your next task is to learn how to manipulate a `DataSet` manually. Once you understand how to do so, you will have no problem manipulating the contents of a `DataSet` retrieved from a data adapter object.

Understanding the Role of the DataSet

Simply put, a `DataSet` is an in-memory representation of external data. More specifically, a `DataSet` is a class type that maintains three internal strongly typed collections (see Figure 22-11).

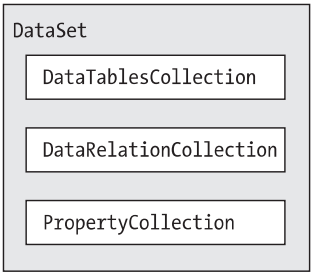


Figure 22-11. *The anatomy of a* `DataSet`

The `Tables` property of the `DataSet` allows you to access the `DataTableCollection` that contains the individual `DataTables`. Another important collection used by the `DataSet` is the `DataRelationCollection`. Given that a `DataSet` is a disconnected version of a database schema, it can programmatically represent the parent/child relationships between its tables. For example, a relation can be created between two tables to model a foreign key constraint using the `DataRelation` type. This object can then be added to the `DataRelationCollection` through the `Relations` property. At this point, you can navigate between the connected tables as you search for data. You will see how this is done a bit later in the chapter.

The `ExtendedProperties` property provides access to the `PropertyCollection` object, which allows you to associate any extra information to the `DataSet` as name/value pairs. This information can literally be anything at all, even if it has no bearing on the data itself. For example, you can associate your company's name to a `DataSet`, which can then function as in-memory metadata. Other examples of extended properties might include timestamps, an encrypted password that must be supplied to access the contents of the `DataSet`, a number representing a data refresh rate, and so forth.

■ **Note** The `DataTable` class also supports extended properties via the `ExtendedProperties` property.

Members of the DataSet

Before exploring too many other programmatic details, take a look at some core members of the `DataSet`. Beyond the `Tables`, `Relations`, and `ExtendedProperties` properties, Table 22-9 describes some additional properties of interest.

Table 22-9. *Properties of the Mighty* `DataSet`

Property	Meaning in Life
`CaseSensitive`	Indicates whether string comparisons in `DataTable` objects are case sensitive (or not).
`DataSetName`	Represents the friendly name of this `DataSet`. Typically this value is established as a constructor parameter.
`EnforceConstraints`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether constraint rules are followed when attempting any update operation.
`HasErrors`	Gets a value indicating whether there are errors in any of the rows in any of the `DataTables` of the `DataSet`.
`RemotingFormat`	This new .NET 2.0 property allows you to define how the `DataSet` should serialize its content (binary or XML) for the .NET remoting layer.

The methods of the `DataSet` mimic some of the functionality provided by the aforementioned properties. In addition to interacting with XML streams, the `DataSet` provides methods that allow you to copy/clone the contents of your `DataSet`, as well as establish the beginning and ending points of a batch of updates. Table 22-10 describes some core methods.

Table 22-10. *Methods of the Mighty* `DataSet`

Methods	Meaning in Life
`AcceptChanges()`	Commits all the changes made to this `DataSet` since it was loaded or the last time `AcceptChanges()` was called.
`Clear()`	Completely clears the `DataSet` data by removing every row in each `DataTable`.
`Clone()`	Clones the structure of the `DataSet`, including all `DataTables`, as well as all relations and any constraints.
`Copy()`	Copies both the structure and data for this `DataSet`.
`GetChanges()`	Returns a copy of the `DataSet` containing all changes made to it since it was last loaded or since `AcceptChanges()` was called.
`GetChildRelations()`	Returns the collection of child relations that belong to a specified table.
`GetParentRelations()`	Gets the collection of parent relations that belong to a specified table.
`HasChanges()`	Overloaded. Gets a value indicating whether the `DataSet` has changes, including new, deleted, or modified rows.
`Merge()`	Overloaded. Merges this `DataSet` with a specified `DataSet`.
`ReadXml()` `ReadXmlSchema()`	Allow you to read XML data from a valid stream (file based, memory based, or network based) into the `DataSet`.
`RejectChanges()`	Rolls back all the changes made to this `DataSet` since it was created or the last time `DataSet.AcceptChanges` was called.
`WriteXml()` `WriteXmlSchema()`	Allow you to write out the contents of a `DataSet` into a valid stream.

Now that you have a better understanding of the role of the `DataSet` (and some idea of what you can do with one), create a new console application named SimpleDataSet. Within the `Main()` method, define a new `DataSet` object that contains two extended properties representing your company name and timestamp (don't forget to "use" `System.Data`):

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with DataSets *****\n");

        // Create the DataSet object.
        DataSet carsInventoryDS = new DataSet("Car Inventory");
        carsInventoryDS.ExtendedProperties["TimeStamp"] = DateTime.Now;
        carsInventoryDS.ExtendedProperties["Company"] = "Intertech Training";
    }
}
```

A DataSet without DataTables is a bit like a workweek without a weekend. Therefore, the next task is to examine the internal composition of the DataTable, beginning with the DataColumn type.

Working with DataColumns

The DataColumn type represents a single column within a DataTable. Collectively speaking, the set of all DataColumn types bound to a given DataTable represents the foundation of a table's schema information. For example, if you were to model the Inventory table of the Cars database, you would create four DataColumns, one for each column (CarID, Make, Color, and PetName). Once you have created your DataColumn objects, they are typically added into the columns collection of the DataTable type (via the Columns property).

If you have a background in relational database theory, you know that a given column in a data table can be assigned a set of constraints (e.g., configured as a primary key, assigned a default value, configured to contain read-only information, etc.). Also, every column in a table must map to an underlying data type. For example, the Inventory table's schema requires that the CarID column map to an integer, while Make, Color, and PetName map to an array of characters. The DataColumn class has numerous properties that allow you to configure these very things. Table 22-11 provides a rundown of some core properties.

Table 22-11. *Properties of the* DataColumn

Properties	Meaning in Life
AllowDBNull	This property is used to indicate if a row can specify null values in this column. The default value is true.
AutoIncrement AutoIncrementSeed AutoIncrementStep	These properties are used to configure the autoincrement behavior for a given column. This can be helpful when you wish to ensure unique values in a given DataColumn (such as a primary key). By default, a DataColumn does not support autoincrement behavior
Caption	This property gets or sets the caption to be displayed for this column (e.g., what the end user sees in a DataGridView).
ColumnMapping	This property determines how a DataColumn is represented when a DataSet is saved as an XML document using the DataSet.WriteXml() method.
ColumnName	This property gets or sets the name of the column in the Columns collection (meaning how it is represented internally by the DataTable). If you do not set the ColumnName explicitly, the default values are Column with (n+1) numerical suffixes (i.e., Column1, Column2, Column3, etc.).
DataType	This property defines the data type (Boolean, string, float, etc.) stored in the column.
DefaultValue	This property gets or sets the default value assigned to this column when inserting new rows. This is used if not otherwise specified.

Properties	Meaning in Life
Expression	This property gets or sets the expression used to filter rows, calculate a column's value, or create an aggregate column.
Ordinal	This property gets the numerical position of the column in the Columns collection maintained by the DataTable.
ReadOnly	This property determines if this column can be modified once a row has been added to the table. The default is false.
Table	This property gets the DataTable that contains this DataColumn.
Unique	This property gets or sets a value indicating whether the values in each row of the column must be unique or if repeating values are permissible. If a column is assigned a primary key constraint, the Unique property should be set to true.

Building a DataColumn

To continue with the SimpleDataSet project (and illustrate the use of the DataColumn), assume you wish to model the columns of the Inventory table. Given that the CarID column will be the table's primary key, you will configure the DataColumn object as read-only, unique, and non-null (using the ReadOnly, Unique, and AllowDBNull properties). Update the Main() method to build four DataColumn objects:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Create data columns that map to the
    // 'real' columns in the Inventory table
    // of the Cars database.
    DataColumn carIDColumn = new DataColumn("CarID", typeof(int));
    carIDColumn.Caption = "Car ID";
    carIDColumn.ReadOnly = true;
    carIDColumn.AllowDBNull = false;
    carIDColumn.Unique = true;

    DataColumn carMakeColumn = new DataColumn("Make", typeof(string));
    DataColumn carColorColumn = new DataColumn("Color", typeof(string));
    DataColumn carPetNameColumn = new DataColumn("PetName", typeof(string));
    carPetNameColumn.Caption = "Pet Name";
}
```

Enabling Autoincrementing Fields

One aspect of the DataColumn you may choose to configure is its ability to *autoincrement*. Simply put, autoincrementing columns are used to ensure that when a new row is added to a given table, the value of this column is assigned automatically, based on the current step of the incrementation. This can be helpful when you wish to ensure that a column has no repeating values (such as a primary key).

This behavior is controlled using the AutoIncrement, AutoIncrementSeed, and AutoIncrementStep properties. The seed value is used to mark the starting value of the column, whereas the step value identifies the number to add to the seed when incrementing. Consider the following update to the construction of the carIDColumn DataColumn:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    DataColumn carIDColumn = new DataColumn("CarID", typeof(int));
```

```
    carIDColumn.ReadOnly = true;
    carIDColumn.Caption = "Car ID";
    carIDColumn.AllowDBNull = false;
    carIDColumn.Unique = true;
    carIDColumn.AutoIncrement = true;
    carIDColumn.AutoIncrementSeed = 0;
    carIDColumn.AutoIncrementStep = 1;
}
```

Here, the `carIDColumn` object has been configured to ensure that as rows are added to the respective table, the value for this column is incremented by 1. Because the seed has been set at 0, this column would be numbered 0, 1, 2, 3, and so forth.

Adding a DataColumn to a DataTable

The `DataColumn` type does not typically exist as a stand-alone entity, but is instead inserted into a related `DataTable`. To illustrate, create a new `DataTable` type (fully detailed in just a moment) and insert each `DataColumn` object in the columns collection using the `Columns` property:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Now add DataColumns to a DataTable.
    DataTable inventoryTable = new DataTable("Inventory");
    inventoryTable.Columns.AddRange(new DataColumn[]
        { carIDColumn, carMakeColumn, carColorColumn, carPetNameColumn });
}
```

Working with DataRows

As you have seen, a collection of `DataColumn` objects represents the schema of a `DataTable`. In contrast, a collection of `DataRow` types represents the actual data in the table. Thus, if you have 20 listings in the Inventory table of the Cars database, you can represent these records using 20 `DataRow` types. Using the members of the `DataRow` class, you are able to insert, remove, evaluate, and manipulate the values in the table. Table 22-12 documents some (but not all) of the members of the `DataRow` type.

Table 22-12. *Key Members of the* `DataRow` *Type*

Members	Meaning in Life

`HasErrors`
`GetColumnsInError()`
`GetColumnError()`
`ClearErrors()`
`RowError`
	The `HasErrors` property returns a Boolean value indicating if there are errors.
	If so, the `GetColumnsInError()` method can be used to obtain the offending members, and `GetColumnError()` can be used to obtain the error description, while the `ClearErrors()` method removes each error listing for the row.
	The `RowError` property allows you to configure a textual description of the error for a given row.

`ItemArray`	This property gets or sets all of the values for this row using an array of objects.
`RowState`	This property is used to pinpoint the current "state" of the `DataRow` using values of the `RowState` enumeration.
`Table`	This property is used to obtain a reference to the `DataTable` containing this `DataRow`.
`AcceptChanges()` `RejectChanges()`	These methods commit or reject all changes made to this row since the last time `AcceptChanges()` was called.

Members	Meaning in Life

`BeginEdit()`
`EndEdit()`
`CancelEdit()`
	These methods begin, end, or cancel an edit operation on a `DataRow` object.

`Delete()`	This method marks this row to be removed when the `AcceptChanges()` method is called.
`IsNull()`	This method gets a value indicating whether the specified column contains a null value.

Working with a `DataRow` is a bit different from working with a `DataColumn`, because you cannot create a direct instance of this type; rather, you obtain a reference from a given `DataTable`. For example, assume you wish to insert two rows in the Inventory table. The `DataTable.NewRow()` method allows you to obtain the next slot in the table, at which point you can fill each column with new data via the type indexer, as shown here:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Now add some rows to the Inventory Table.
    DataRow carRow = inventoryTable.NewRow();
    carRow["Make"] = "BMW";
    carRow["Color"] = "Black";
    carRow["PetName"] = "Hamlet";
    inventoryTable.Rows.Add(carRow);

    carRow = inventoryTable.NewRow();
    carRow["Make"] = "Saab";
    carRow["Color"] = "Red";
    carRow["PetName"] = "Sea Breeze";
    inventoryTable.Rows.Add(carRow);
}
```

Notice how the `DataRow` class defines an indexer that can be used to gain access to a given `DataColumn` by numerical position as well as column name. At this point, you have a single `DataTable` containing two rows.

Understanding the DataRow.RowState Property

The `RowState` property is useful when you need to programmatically identify the set of all rows in a table that have changed, have been newly inserted, and so forth. This property may be assigned any value from the `DataRowState` enumeration, as shown in Table 22-13.

Table 22-13. *Values of the* `DataRowState` *Enumeration*

Value	Meaning in Life
`Added`	The row has been added to a `DataRowCollection`, and `AcceptChanges()` has not been called.
`Deleted`	The row has been deleted via the `Delete()` method of the `DataRow`.
`Detached`	The row has been created but is not part of any `DataRowCollection`. A `DataRow` is in this state immediately after it has been created and before it is added to a collection, or if it has been removed from a collection.
`Modified`	The row has been modified, and `AcceptChanges()` has not been called.
`Unchanged`	The row has not changed since `AcceptChanges()` was last called.

While you are programmatically manipulating the rows of a given `DataTable`, the `RowState` property is set automatically:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    DataRow carRow = inventoryTable.NewRow();
    // Prints out: Row State is: Detatched.
    Console.WriteLine("Row State is: {0}.", carRow.RowState);
    carRow["Make"] = "BMW";
    carRow["Color"] = "Black";
    carRow["PetName"] = "Hamlet";
    inventoryTable.Rows.Add(carRow);

    // Prints out: Row State is: Added.
    Console.WriteLine("Row State is: {0}.", inventoryTable.Rows[0].RowState);
...
}
```

As you can see, the ADO.NET `DataRow` is smart enough to remember its current state of affairs. Given this, the owning `DataTable` is able to identify which rows have been modified. This is a key feature of the `DataSet`, as when it comes time to send updated information to the data store, only the modified data is submitted.

Working with DataTables

The `DataTable` defines a good number of members, many of which are identical in name and functionality to those of the `DataSet`. Table 22-14 describes some core properties of the `DataTable` type beyond `Rows` and `Columns`.

Table 22-14. *Key Members of the* `DataTable` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`CaseSensitive`	Indicates whether string comparisons within the table are case sensitive (or not). The default value is false.
`ChildRelations`	Returns the collection of child relations for this `DataTable` (if any).
`Constraints`	Gets the collection of constraints maintained by the table.
`DataSet`	Gets the `DataSet` that contains this table (if any).
`DefaultView`	Gets a customized view of the table that may include a filtered view or a cursor position.
`MinimumCapacity`	Gets or sets the initial number of rows in this table (the default is 25).
`ParentRelations`	Gets the collection of parent relations for this `DataTable`.
`PrimaryKey`	Gets or sets an array of columns that function as primary keys for the data table.
`RemotingFormat`	Allows you to define how the `DataSet` should serialize its content (binary or XML) for the .NET remoting layer. This property is new in .NET 2.0.
`TableName`	Gets or sets the name of the table. This same property may also be specified as a constructor parameter.

For the current example, let's set the `PrimaryKey` property of the `DataTable` to the `carIDColumn` `DataColumn` object:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Mark the primary key of this table.
    inventoryTable.PrimaryKey = new DataColumn[] { inventoryTable.Columns[0] };
}
```

Once you do this, the `DataTable` example is complete. The final step is to insert your `DataTable` into the `carsInventoryDS` `DataSet` object. Then you'll pass your `DataSet` to a (yet to be written) helper method named `PrintDataSet()`:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Finally, add our table to the DataSet.
    carsInventoryDS.Tables.Add(inventoryTable);
    // Now print the DataSet.
    PrintDataSet(carsInventoryDS);
}
```

The `PrintDataSet()` method simply iterates over each `DataTable` in the `DataSet`, printing out the column names and row values using the type indexers:

```
static void PrintDataSet(DataSet ds)
{
    Console.WriteLine("Tables in '{0}' DataSet.\n", ds.DataSetName);
    foreach (DataTable dt in ds.Tables)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("{0} Table.\n", dt.TableName);

        // Print out the column names.
        for (int curCol = 0; curCol < dt.Columns.Count; curCol++)
        {
            Console.Write(dt.Columns[curCol].ColumnName.Trim() + "\t");
        }
        Console.WriteLine("\n---------------------------------");

        // Print the DataTable.
        for (int curRow = 0; curRow < dt.Rows.Count; curRow++)
        {
            for (int curCol = 0; curCol < dt.Columns.Count; curCol++)
            {
                Console.Write(dt.Rows[curRow][curCol].ToString() + "\t");
            }
            Console.WriteLine();
        }
    }
}
```

Figure 22-12 shows the program's output.

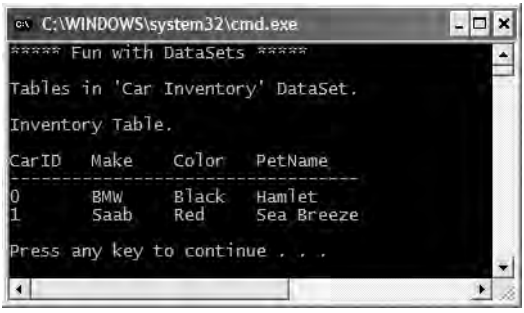

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Fun with DataSets *****
Tables in 'Car Inventory' DataSet.
Inventory Table.
CarID Make Color PetName
0 BMW Black Hamlet
1 Saab Red Sea Breeze
Press any key to continue . . .

Figure 22-12. *Contents of the example's* `DataSet` *object*

Working with .NET 2.0 DataTableReaders

`DataTables` provide a number of methods beyond what we've examined thus far. For example, like `DataSets`, `DataTables` support `AcceptChanges()`, `GetChanges()`, `Copy()`, and `ReadXml()`/`WriteXml()` methods. As of .NET 2.0, `DataTables` also now support a method named `CreateDataReader()`. This method allows you to obtain the data within a `DataTable` using a data reader–like navigation scheme (forward-only, read-only). To illustrate, create a new helper function named `PrintTable()`, implemented as so:

```
private static void PrintTable(DataTable dt)
{
    Console.WriteLine("\n***** Rows in DataTable *****");

    // Get the new .NET 2.0 DataTableReader type.
    DataTableReader dtReader = dt.CreateDataReader();

    // The DataTableReader works just like the DataReader.
    while (dtReader.Read())
    {
        for (int i = 0; i < dtReader.FieldCount; i++)
        {
            Console.Write("{0} = {1} ",
                dtReader.GetName(i),
                dtReader.GetValue(i).ToString().Trim());
        }
        Console.WriteLine();
    }
    dtReader.Close();
}
```

Notice that the `DataTableReader` works identically to the data reader object of your data provider. Using a `DataTableReader` can be an ideal choice when you wish to quickly pump out the data within a `DataTable` without needing to traverse the internal row and column collections. To call this method, simply pass in the correct table:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Print out the DataTable via 'table reader'.
    PrintTable(carsInventoryDS.Tables["Inventory"]);
}
```

Persisting DataSets (and DataTables) As XML

To wrap up the current example, recall that DataSets and DataTables both support WriteXml() and ReadXml() methods. WriteXml() allows you to persist the object's content to a local file (as well as into any System.IO.Stream-derived type) as an XML document. ReadXml() allows you to hydrate the state of a DataSet (or DataTable) from a given XML document. In addition, DataSets and DataTables both support WriteXmlSchema() and ReadXmlSchema() to save or load an *.xsd file. To test this out for yourself, update your Main() method with the final set of code statements:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Save this DataSet as XML.
    carsInventoryDS.WriteXml("carsDataSet.xml");
    carsInventoryDS.WriteXmlSchema("carsDataSet.xsd");

    // Clear out DataSet and print contents (which are empty).
    carsInventoryDS.Clear();
    PrintDataSet(carsInventoryDS);

    // Load and print the DataSet.
    carsInventoryDS.ReadXml("carsDataSet.xml");
    PrintDataSet(carsInventoryDS);
}
```

If you open the carsDataSet.xml file, you will find that each column in the table has been encoded as an XML element:

```
<?xml version="1.0" standalone="yes"?>
<Car_x0020_Inventory>
  <Inventory>
    <CarID>0</CarID>
    <Make>BMW</Make>
    <Color>Black</Color>
    <PetName>Hamlet</PetName>
  </Inventory>
  <Inventory>
    <CarID>1</CarID>
    <Make>Saab</Make>
    <Color>Red</Color>
    <PetName>Sea Breeze</PetName>
  </Inventory>
</Car_x0020_Inventory>
```

Finally, recall that the DataColumn type supports a property named ColumnMapping, which can be used to control how a column should be represented in XML. The default setting is MappingType.Element. However, if you establish the CarID column as an XML attribute as follows by updating your existing carIDColumn DataColumn object

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    ...
    DataColumn carIDColumn = new DataColumn("CarID", typeof(int));
    ...
    carIDColumn.ColumnMapping = MappingType.Attribute;
}
```

you will find the following XML:

```
<?xml version="1.0" standalone="yes"?>
<Car_x0020_Inventory>
  <Inventory CarID="0">
    <Make>BMW</Make>
    <Color>Black</Color>
    <PetName>Hamlet</PetName>
  </Inventory>
  <Inventory CarID="1">
    <Make>Saab</Make>
    <Color>Red</Color>
    <PetName>Sea Breeze</PetName>
  </Inventory>
</Car_x0020_Inventory>
```

■ **Source Code** The SimpleDataSet application is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Binding DataTables to User Interfaces

Now that you have been exposed to the process of interacting with `DataSets` in the raw, let's see a Windows Forms example. Your goal is to build a Form that displays the contents of a `DataTable` within a `DataGridView` widget. Figure 22-13 shows the initial UI design.



Figure 22-13. *Binding a* `DataTable` *to a* `DataGridView`

■ **Note** As of .NET 2.0, the `DataGridView` widget is the preferred UI control used to bind relational data. Do be aware, however, that the legacy .NET 1.*x* `DataGrid` control is still available.

To begin, create a new Windows Forms application named CarDataTableViewer. Add a `DataGridView` widget (named `carInventoryGridView`) and descriptive `Label` to your designer. Next, insert a new C# class into your project (named `Car`), which is defined as follows:

```
public class Car
{
    // Made public for ease of use.
    public string carPetName, carMake, carColor;

    public Car(string petName, string make, string color)
    {
        carPetName = petName;
```

```
        carColor = color;
        carMake = make;
    }
}
```

Now, within the Form's default constructor, populate a `List<>` member variable with a set of new `Car` objects:

```
public partial class MainForm : System.Windows.Forms.Form
{
    // Our list of Cars.
    private List<Car> arTheCars = new List<Car>();

    public MainForm()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
        CenterToScreen();

        // Fill the list with some cars.
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Chucky", "BMW", "Green"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Tiny", "Yugo", "White"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("", "Jeep", "Tan"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Pain Inducer", "Caravan", "Pink"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Fred", "BMW", "Pea Soup Green"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Buddha", "BMW", "Black"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Mel", "Firebird", "Red"));
        arTheCars.Add(new Car("Sarah", "Colt", "Black"));
    }
}
```

Like the previous SimpleDataSet example, the CarDataTableViewer application will construct a `DataTable` that contains four `DataColumns` to represent the columns of the Inventory table within the Cars database. As well, this `DataTable` will contain a set of `DataRows` to represent a list of automobiles. This time, however, you will fill the rows using your generic `List<>` member variable.

First, add a new member variable named `inventoryTable` of type `DataTable` to your Form. Next, add a new helper function to your `Form` class named `CreateDataTable()`, and call this method within the Form's default constructor. The code required to add the `DataColumns` to the `DataTable` object is identical to that in the previous example, so I'll omit it here (consult this book's code download for complete details). Do note, though, that you are iterating over each member of the `List<>` to build your row set:

```
private void CreateDataTable()
{
    // Create DataColumns and add to DataTable.
...
    // Iterate over the array list to make rows.
    foreach(Car c in arTheCars)
    {
        DataRow newRow = inventoryTable.NewRow();
        newRow["Make"] = c.carMake;
        newRow["Color"] = c.carColor;
        newRow["PetName"] = c.carPetName;
        inventoryTable.Rows.Add(newRow);
    }

    // Bind the DataTable to the carInventoryGridView.
    carInventoryGridView.DataSource = inventoryTable;
}
```

Notice that the final line of code within the `CreateDataTable()` method assigns the `inventoryTable` to the `DataSource` property. This single property is all you need to set to bind a `DataTable` to a `DataGridView` object. As you might guess, this GUI widget is reading the rows and column collections internally to establish the UI. At this point, you should be able to run your application and see the `DataTable` within the `DataGridView` control.

Programmatically Deleting Rows

Now, what if you wish to remove a row from a `DataTable`? One approach is to call the `Delete()` method of the `DataRow` object that represents the row to terminate. Simply specify the index (or `DataRow` object) representing the row to remove. Assume you update your GUI as shown in Figure 22-14.

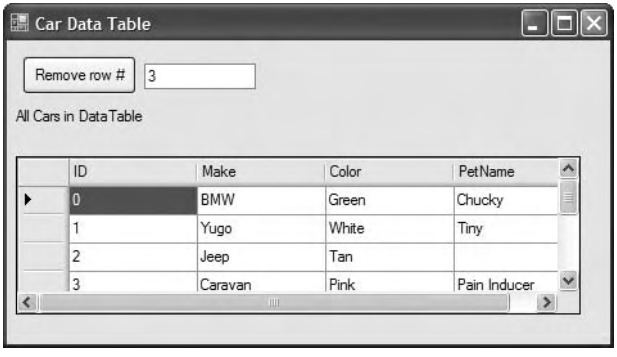


Figure 22-14. *Removing rows from the* `DataTable`

The following logic behind the new `Button`'s `Click` event handler removes the specified row from your in-memory `DataTable`:

```
// Remove this row from the DataRowCollection.
private void btnRemoveRow_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     try
     {
          inventoryTable.Rows[(int.Parse(txtRowToRemove.Text))].Delete();
          inventoryTable.AcceptChanges();
     }
     catch(Exception ex)
     {
          MessageBox.Show(ex.Message);
     }
}
```

The `Delete()` method might have been better named `MarkedAsDeletable()`, as the row is not literally removed until the `DataTable.AcceptChanges()` method is called. In effect, the `Delete()` method simply sets a flag that says, "I am ready to die when my table tells me to." Also understand that if a row has been marked for deletion, a `DataTable` may reject the delete operation via `RejectChanges()`, as shown here:

```
// Mark a row as deleted, but reject the changes.
private void btnRemoveRow_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
```

```
    inventoryTable.Rows[(int.Parse(txtRemove.Text))].Delete();
    // Do more work
    ...
    inventoryTable.RejectChanges();     // Restore previous RowState value.
}
```

Applying Filters and Sort Orders

You may wish to see a small subset of a `DataTable`'s data, as specified by some sort of filtering criteria. For example, what if you wish to see only a certain make of automobile from the in-memory Inventory table? The `Select()` method of the `DataTable` class provides this very functionality. Update your GUI once again, this time allowing users to specify a string that represents the make of the automobile they are interested in viewing (see Figure 22-15). The result will be placed into a Windows Forms message box.

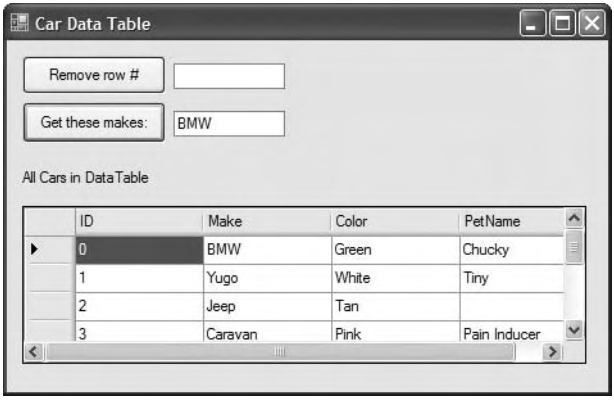


Figure 22-15. *Specifying a filter*

The `Select()` method has been overloaded a number of times to provide different selection semantics. At its most basic level, the parameter sent to `Select()` is a string that contains some conditional operation. To begin, observe the following logic for the `Click` event handler of your new button:

```
private void btnGetMakes_Click (object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Build a filter based on user input.
    string filterStr = string.Format("Make= '{0}' ", txtMakeToGet.Text);

    // Find all rows matching the filter.
    DataRow[] makes = inventoryTable.Select(filterStr);

    // Show what we got!
    if(makes.Length == 0)
        MessageBox.Show("Sorry, no cars...", "Selection error!");
    else
    {
        string strMake = null;
        for(int i = 0; i < makes.Length; i++)
```

```
        {
            DataRow temp = makes[i];
            strMake += temp["PetName"] + "\n";
        }
        MessageBox.Show(strMake, txtMakeToGet.Text + " type(s):");
    }
}
```

Here, you first build a simple filter based on the value in the associated `TextBox`. If you specify BMW, your filter is `Make = 'BMW'`. When you send this filter to the `Select()` method, you get back an array of `DataRow` types that represent each row that matches the filter (see Figure 22-16).



Figure 22-16. *Displaying filtered data*

As you can see, filtering logic is standard SQL syntax. To prove the point, assume you wish to obtain the results of the previous `Select()` invocation alphabetically based on pet name. In terms of SQL, this translates into a sort based on the PetName column. Luckily, the `Select()` method has been overloaded to send in a sort criterion, as shown here:

```
// Sort by PetName.
makes = inventoryTable.Select(filterStr, "PetName");
```

If you want the results in descending order, call `Select()`, as shown here:

```
// Return results in descending order.
makes = inventoryTable.Select(filterStr, "PetName DESC");
```

In general, the sort string contains the column name followed by "ASC" (ascending, which is the default) or "DESC" (descending). If need be, multiple columns can be separated by commas. Finally, understand that a filter string can be composed of any number of relational operators. For example, what if you want to find all cars with an ID greater than 5? Here is a helper function that does this very thing:

```
private void ShowCarsWithIdLessThanFive()
{
    // Now show the pet names of all cars with ID greater than 5.
    DataRow[] properIDs;
    string newFilterStr = "ID > 5";
    properIDs = inventoryTable.Select(newFilterStr);
    string strIDs = null;
    for(int i = 0; i < properIDs.Length; i++)
    {
        DataRow temp = properIDs[i];
        strIDs += temp["PetName"]
            + " is ID " + temp["ID"] + "\n";
    }
    MessageBox.Show(strIDs, "Pet names of cars where ID > 5");
}
```

Updating Rows

The final aspect of the DataTable you should be aware of is the process of updating an existing row with new values. One approach is to first obtain the row(s) that match a given filter criterion using the Select() method. Once you have the DataRow(s) in question, modify them accordingly. For example, assume you have a new Button that (when clicked) searches the DataTable for all rows where Make is equal to BMW. Once you identify these items, you change the Make from BMW to Colt:

```
// Find the rows you want to edit with a filter.
private void btnChangeBeemersToColts_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Make sure user has not lost his mind.
    if (DialogResult.Yes ==
        MessageBox.Show("Are you sure?? BMWs are much nicer than Colts!",
        "Please Confirm!", MessageBoxButtons.YesNo))
    {
        // Build a filter.
        string filterStr = "Make='BMW'";
        string strMake = null;

        // Find all rows matching the filter.
        DataRow[] makes = inventoryTable.Select(filterStr);

        // Change all Beemers to Colts!
        for (int i = 0; i < makes.Length; i++)
        {
            DataRow temp = makes[i];
            strMake += temp["Make"] = "Colt";
            makes[i] = temp;
        }
    }
}
```

The DataRow class also provides the BeginEdit(), EndEdit(), and CancelEdit() methods, which allow you to edit the content of a row while temporarily suspending any associated validation rules. In the previous logic, each row was validated with each assignment. (Also, if you capture any events from the DataRow, they fire with each modification.) When you call BeginEdit() on a given DataRow, the row is placed in edit mode. At this point you can make your changes as necessary and call either EndEdit() to commit these changes or CancelEdit() to roll back the changes to the original version, for example:

```
private void UpdateSomeRow()
{
    // Assume you have obtained a row to edit.
    // Now place this row in edit mode.
    rowToUpdate.BeginEdit();

    // Send the row to a helper function, which returns a Boolean.
    if( ChangeValuesForThisRow( rowToUpdate) )
        rowToUpdate.EndEdit();     // OK!
    else
        rowToUpdate.CancelEdit();  // Forget it.
}
```

Although you are free to manually call these methods on a given DataRow, these members are automatically called when you edit a DataGridView widget that has been bound to a DataTable. For example, when you select a row to edit from a DataGridView, that row is automatically placed in edit mode. When you shift focus to a new row, EndEdit() is called automatically.

Working with the DataView Type

In database nomenclature, a *view object* is a stylized representation of a table (or set of tables). For example, using Microsoft SQL Server, you could create a view for your current Inventory table that returns a new table containing automobiles only of a given color. In ADO.NET, the `DataView` type allows you to programmatically extract a subset of data from the `DataTable` into a stand-alone object.

One great advantage of holding multiple views of the same table is that you can bind these views to various GUI widgets (such as the `DataGridView`). For example, one `DataGridView` might be bound to a `DataView` showing all autos in the Inventory, while another might be configured to display only green automobiles.

To illustrate, update the current UI with an additional `DataGridView` type named `dataGridColtsView` and a descriptive `Label`. Next, define a member variable named `coltsOnlyView` of type `DataView`:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
     // View of the DataTable.
     DataView coltsOnlyView;      // I only show red colts.
...
}
```

Now, create a new helper function named `CreateDataView()`, and call this method within the Form's default constructor directly after the `DataTable` has been fully constructed, as shown here:

```
public MainForm()
{
...
    // Make a data table.
    CreateDataTable();
    // Make Views.
    CreateDataView();
}
```

Here is the implementation of this new helper function. Notice that the constructor of each `DataView` has been passed the `DataTable` that will be used to build the custom set of data rows.

```
private void CreateDataView()
{
    // Set the table that is used to construct this view.
    coltsOnlyView = new DataView(inventoryTable);

    // Now configure the views using a filter.
    coltsOnlyView.RowFilter = "Make = 'Colt'";

   // Bind to grid.
    dataGridColtsView.DataSource = coltsOnlyView;
}
```

As you can see, the `DataView` class supports a property named `RowFilter`, which contains the string representing the filtering criteria used to extract matching rows. Once you have your view established, set the grid's `DataSource` property accordingly. Figure 22-17 shows the completed application in action.

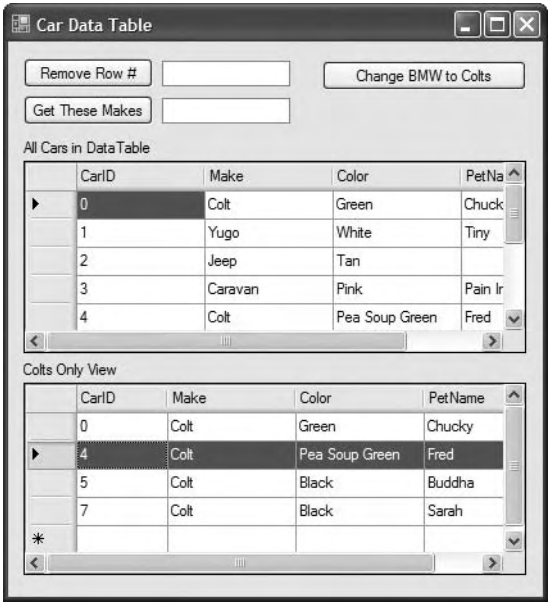

Car Data Table
Remove Row #
Change BMW to Colts
Get These Makes
All Cars in DataTable
CarID Make Color PetNa
0 Colt Green Chuck
1 Yugo White Tiny
2 Jeep Tan
3 Caravan Pink Pain Ir
4 Colt Pea Soup Green Fred
Colts Only View
CarID Make Color PetName
0 Colt Green Chucky
4 Colt Pea Soup Green Fred
5 Colt Black Buddha
7 Colt Black Sarah

Figure 22-17. *Displaying filtered data*

■ **Source Code** The CarDataTableViewer project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Working with Data Adapters

Now that you understand the ins and outs of manipulating ADO.NET `DataSets`, let's turn our attention to the topic of data adapters. Recall that data adapter objects are used to fill a `DataSet` with `DataTable` objects and send modified `DataTables` back to the database for processing. Table 22-15 documents the core members of the `DbDataAdapter` base class.

Table 22-15. *Core Members of the* `DbDataAdapter` *Class*

Members	Meaning in Life

`SelectCommand`
`InsertCommand`
`UpdateCommand`
`DeleteCommand`
	Establish SQL commands that will be issued to the data store when the `Fill()` and `Update()` methods are called.

`Fill()`	Fills a given table in the `DataSet` with some number of records based on the command object–specified `SelectCommand`.
`Update()`	Updates a `DataTable` using command objects within the `InsertCommand`, `UpdateCommand`, or `DeleteCommand` property. The exact command that is executed is based on the `RowState` value for a given `DataRow` in a given `DataTable` (of a given `DataSet`).

In the examples that follow, remember that data adapter objects manage the underlying connection to the database on your behalf; therefore, you will not need to explicitly open or close your session with the DBMS. However, you will still need to supply the data adapter with a valid connection object or a connection string (which will be used to build a connection object internally) as a constructor argument.

Filling a DataSet Using a Data Adapter

Create a new console application named FillDataSetWithSqlDataAdapter and make use of the `System.Data` and `System.Data.SqlClient` namespaces. Update your `Main()` method as so (`try/catch` logic has been omitted here for simplicity):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with Data Adapters *****\n");
    string cnStr = "uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;Data Source=(local)";

    // Fill the DataSet with a new DataTable.
    DataSet myDS = new DataSet("Cars");
    SqlDataAdapter dAdapt = new SqlDataAdapter("Select * From Inventory", cnStr);
    dAdapt.Fill(myDS, "Inventory");

    // Display contents.
    PrintDataSet(myDS);
}
```

Notice that the data adapter has been constructed by specifying a SQL Select statement. This value will be used to build a command object internally, which can be later obtained via the `SelectCommand` property. Next, notice that the `Fill()` method takes an instance of the `DataSet` type and optionally a string name that will be used to set the `TableName` property of the new `DataTable` (if you do not specify a table name, the data adapter will simply name the table "Table").

■ **Note** The `Fill()` method returns an integer that represents the number of rows affected by the SQL query.

As you would expect, when you pass the `DataSet` to the `PrintDataSet()` method (implemented earlier in this chapter), you are presented with a list of all rows in the Inventory table of the Cars database (see Figure 22-18).

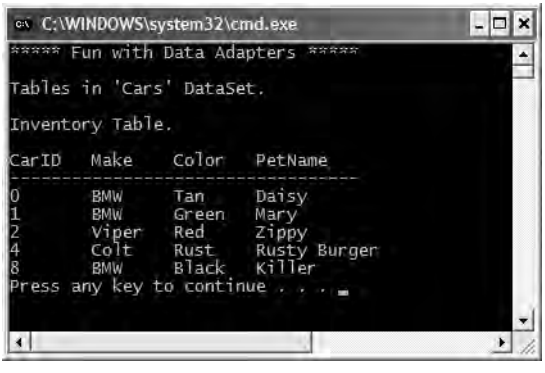

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
***** Fun with Data Adapters *****
Tables in 'Cars' DataSet.
Inventory Table.
CarID Make Color PetName
0 BMW Tan Daisy
1 BMW Green Mary
2 Viper Red Zippy
4 Colt Rust Rusty Burger
8 BMW Black Killer
Press any key to continue . . .

Figure 22-18. *Filling a* `DataSet` *with a data adapter object*

Mapping Database Names to Friendly Names

As you most certainly know, database administrators (DBAs) tend to create table and column names that can be less than friendly to end users. The good news is that data adapter objects maintain an internal strongly named collection (`DataTableMappingCollection`) of `System.Data.Common.DataTableMapping` types, accessed via the `TableMappings` property.

If you so choose, you may manipulate this collection to inform a `DataTable` about which "display names" it should use when asked to print its contents. For example, assume that you wish to map the DBMS table name "Inventory" to "Current Inventory" for display purposes. Furthermore, say you wish to display the CarID column name as "Car ID" (note the extra space) and the PetName column name as "Name of Car." To do so, add the following code before calling the `Fill()` method of your data adapter object (and be sure to "use" the `System.Data.Common` namespace):

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
...
    // Now map DB column names to user-friendly names.
    DataTableMapping custMap =
        dAdapt.TableMappings.Add("Inventory", "Current Inventory");
    custMap.ColumnMappings.Add("CarID", "Car ID");
    custMap.ColumnMappings.Add("PetName", "Name of Car");
    dAdapt.Fill(myDS, "Inventory");
...
}
```

If you were to run this program once again, you would find that the `PrintDataSet()` method now displays the "friendly names" of the `DataTable` and `DataRow` objects, rather than the names established by the database schema.

■ **Source Code** The FillDataSetWithSqlDataAdapter project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Updating a Database Using Data Adapter Objects

Not only do data adapters fill the tables of a `DataSet` on your behalf, but they are also in charge of maintaining a set of core SQL command objects used to push updates back to the data store. When you call the `Update()` method of a given data adapter, it will examine the `RowState` property for each row in the `DataTable` and use the correct SQL commands assigned to the `DeleteCommand`, `InsertCommand`, and `UpdateCommand` properties to push the changes within a given `DataTable` back to the data source.

To illustrate the process of using a data adapter to push back modifications in a `DataTable`, the next example will re-engineer the CarsInvertoryUpdater example developed earlier in the chapter to now make use of `DataSet` and data adapter objects. Given that you have already created a bulk of the application, let's focus on the changes to the `DeleteCar()`, `UpdateCarPetName()`, and `InsertNewCar()` methods (check out the downloadable code for full details).

The first basic adjustment to make to the application is to define two new static member variables of the `Program` class to represent your `DataSet` and connection object. As well, the `Main()` method will be modified to fill the `DataSet` with the initial data upon startup:

```
class Program
{
    // The applicationwide DataSet.
    public static DataSet dsCarInventory = new DataSet("CarsDatabase");
```

```
    // The applicationwide connection object.
    public static SqlConnection cnObj = new
        SqlConnection("uid=sa;pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;Data Source=(local)");

    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
...
        // Create the adapter and fill DataSet.
        SqlDataAdapter dAdapter =
            new SqlDataAdapter("Select * From Inventory", cnObj);
        dAdapter.Fill(dsCarInventory, "Inventory");
        ShowInstructions();

        // Logic to get user command...
    }
...
}
```

Also note in the code that follows that the `ListInventory()`, `DeleteCar()`, `UpdateCarPetName()`, and `InsertNewCar()` methods have all been updated to take a `SqlDataAdapter` as the sole parameter.

Setting the InsertCommand Property

When you are using a data adapter to update a `DataSet`, the first order of business is to assign the `UpdateCommand`, `DeleteCommand`, and `InsertCommand` properties with valid command objects (until you do so, these properties return null!). By "valid" command objects, I am referring to the fact that the set of command objects you plug into a data adapter will change based on the table you are attempting to update. In this example, the table in question is Inventory. Here is the modified `InsertNewCar()` method:

```
private static void InsertNewCar(SqlDataAdapter dAdpater)
{
    // Gather info about new car.
...
    // Format SQL Insert and plug into DataAdapter.
    string sql = string.Format("Insert Into Inventory" +
        "(CarID, Make, Color, PetName) Values" +
        "('{0}', '{1}', '{2}', '{3}')",
        newCarID, newCarMake, newCarColor, newCarPetName);
    dAdpater.InsertCommand = new SqlCommand(sql);
    dAdpater.InsertCommand.Connection = cnObj;

    // Update Inventory Table with new row.
    DataRow newCar = dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"].NewRow();
    newCar["CarID"] = newCarID;
    newCar["Make"] = newCarMake;
    newCar["Color"] = newCarColor;
    newCar["PetName"] = newCarPetName;
    dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"].Rows.Add(newCar);
    dAdpater.Update(dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"]);
}
```

Once you have created your command object, you plug it into the adapter via the `InsertCommand` property. Next, you add a new row to the Inventory `DataTable` maintained by the `dsCarInventory` object. Once you have added this `DataRow` back into the `DataTable`, the adapter will execute the SQL found within the `InsertCommand` property, given that the `RowState` of this new row is `DataRowState.Added`.

Setting the UpdateCommand Property

The modification of the `UpdateCarPetName()` method is more or less identical. Simply build a new command object and plug it into the `UpdateCommand` property.

```
private static void UpdateCarPetName(SqlDataAdapter dAdpater)
{
    // Gather info about car to update.
...
    // Format SQL Insert and plug into DataAdapter.
    string sql = string.Format
    ("Update Inventory Set PetName = '{0}' Where CarID = '{1}'",
        newPetName, carToUpdate);
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cnObj);
    dAdpater.UpdateCommand = cmd;

    DataRow[] carRowToUpdate =
        dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"].Select(
            string.Format("CarID = '{0}'", carToUpdate));
    carRowToUpdate[0]["PetName"] = newPetName;
    dAdpater.Update(dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"]);
}
```

In this case, when you select a specific row (via the `Select()` method), the `RowState` value of said row is automatically set to `DataRowState.Modified`. The only other point of interest here is that the `Select()` method returns an array of `DataRow` objects; therefore, you must specify the exact row you wish to modify.

Setting the DeleteCommand Property

Last but not least, you have the following update to the `DeleteCar()` method:

```
private static void DeleteCar(SqlDataAdapter dAdpater)
{
    // Get ID of car to delete.
,,,
    string sql = string.Format("Delete from Inventory where CarID = '{0}'",
        carToDelete);
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cnObj);
    dAdpater.DeleteCommand = cmd;

    DataRow[] carRowToDelete =
        dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"].Select(string.Format("CarID = '{0}'",
        carToDelete));
    carRowToDelete[0].Delete();
    dAdpater.Update(dsCarInventory.Tables["Inventory"]);
}
```

In this case, you find the row you wish to delete (again using the `Select()` method) and then set the `RowState` property to `DataRowState.Deleted` by calling `Delete()`.

■ **Source Code** The CarsInvertoryUpdaterDS project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Autogenerating SQL Commands Using Command-Builder Types

You might agree that working with data adapters can entail a fair amount of code, given the need to build each of the four command objects and the associated connection string (or `DbConnection`-derived object). To help simplify matters, each of the ADO.NET data providers that ships with .NET 2.0 provides a *command builder* type. Using this type, you are able to automatically obtain command objects that contain the correct Insert, Delete, and Update command types based on the initial Select statement.

The `SqlCommandBuilder` automatically generates the values contained within the `SqlDataAdapter`'s `InsertCommand`, `UpdateCommand`, and `DeleteCommand` properties based on the initial `SelectCommand`. Clearly, the benefit is that you have no need to build all the `SqlCommand` and `SqlParameter` types by hand.

An obvious question at this point is how a command builder is able to build these SQL command objects on the fly. The short answer is metadata. At runtime, when you call the `Update()` method of a data adapter, the related command builder will read the database's schema data to autogenerate the underlying insert, delete, and update command objects.

Consider the following example, which deletes a row in a `DataSet` using the autogenerated SQL statements. Furthermore, this application will print out the underlying command text of each command object:

```
static void Main(string[] args)
{
    DataSet theCarsInventory = new DataSet();

    // Make connection.
    SqlConnection cn = new
        SqlConnection("server=(local);User ID=sa;Pwd=;database=Cars");

    // Autogenerate Insert, Update, and Delete commands
    // based on existing Select command.
    SqlDataAdapter da = new SqlDataAdapter("SELECT * FROM Inventory", cn);
    SqlCommandBuilder invBuilder = new SqlCommandBuilder(da);

    // Fill data set.
    da.Fill(theCarsInventory, "Inventory");
    PrintDataSet(theCarsInventory);

    // Delete row based on user input and update database.
    try
    {
        Console.Write("Row # to delete: ");
        int rowToDelete = int.Parse(Console.ReadLine());
        theCarsInventory.Tables["Inventory"].Rows[rowToDelete].Delete();
        da.Update(theCarsInventory, "Inventory");
    }
    catch (Exception e)
    {
        Console.WriteLine(e.Message);
    }

    // Refill and reprint Inventory table.
    theCarsInventory = new DataSet();
    da.Fill(theCarsInventory, "Inventory");
    PrintDataSet(theCarsInventory);
}
```

In the previous code, notice that you made no use of the command builder object (`SqlCommandBuilder` in this case) beyond passing in the data adapter object as a constructor parameter. As odd as this may seem, this is all you are required to do (at a minimum). Under the hood, this type will configure the data adapter with the remaining command objects.

Now, while you may love the idea of getting something for nothing, do understand that command builders come with some critical restrictions. Specifically, a command builder is only able to autogenerate SQL commands for use by a data adapter if all of the following conditions are true:

- The Select command interacts with only a single table (e.g., no joins).
- The single table has been attributed with a primary key.
- The column(s) representing the primary key is accounted for in your SQL Select statement.

In any case, Figure 22-19 verifies that the specified row has been deleted from the physical database (don't confuse the CarID value with the ordinal row number value when you run this example code!).

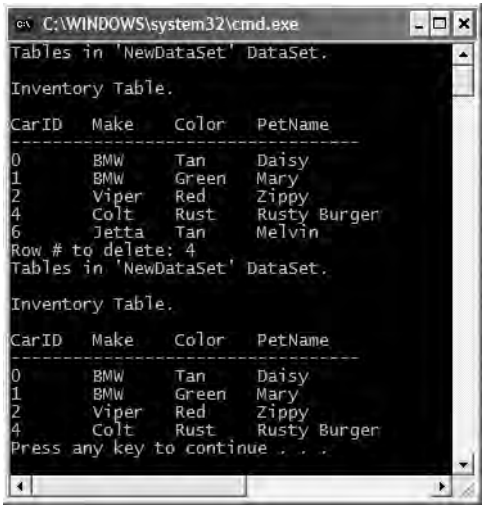

C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe
Tables in 'NewDataSet' DataSet.
Inventory Table.
CarID Make Color PetName
0 BMW Tan Daisy
1 BMW Green Mary
2 Viper Red Zippy
4 Colt Rust Rusty Burger
6 Jetta Tan Melvin
Row # to delete: 4
Tables in 'NewDataSet' DataSet.
Inventory Table.
CarID Make Color PetName
0 BMW Tan Daisy
1 BMW Green Mary
2 Viper Red Zippy
4 Colt Rust Rusty Burger
Press any key to continue . . .

Figure 22-19. *Leveraging autogenerated SQL commands*

■ **Source Code** The MySqlCommandBuilder project is found under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

Multitabled DataSets and DataRelation Objects

Currently, all of this chapter's examples involved `DataSet`s that contained a single `DataTable` object. However, the power of the disconnected layer really comes to light when a `DataSet` object contains numerous interrelated `DataTable`s. In this case, you are able to insert any number of `DataRelation` objects into the `DataSet`'s `DataRelation` collection to account for the interdependencies of the tables. Using these objects, the client tier is able to navigate between the table data without incurring network round-trips.

To illustrate the use of data relation objects, create a new Windows Forms project called MultitabledDataSet. The GUI is simple enough. In Figure 22-20 you can see three `DataGridView` widgets that hold the data retrieved from the Inventory, Orders, and Customers tables of the Cars database. In addition, the single `Button` pushes any and all changes back to the data store.

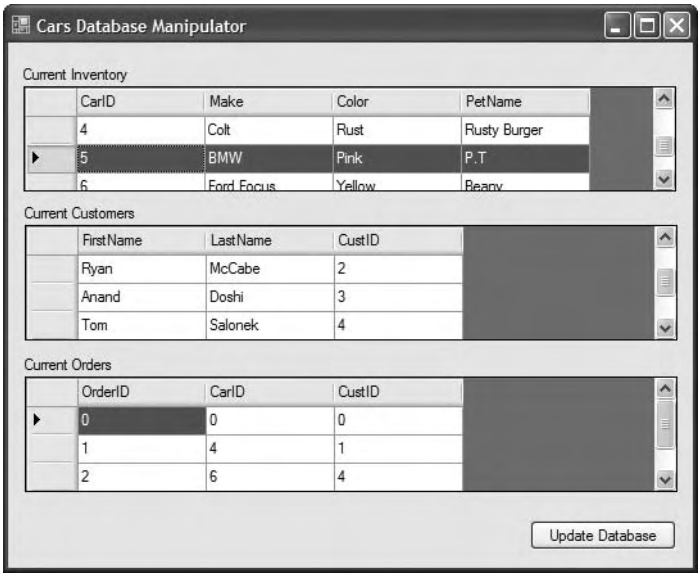


Figure 22-20. *Viewing related* `DataTable`*s*

To keep things simple, the `MainForm` will make use of command builders to autogenerate the SQL commands for each of the three `SqlDataAdapters` (one for each table). Here is the initial update to the `Form`-derived type:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    // Formwide DataSet.
    private DataSet carsDS = new DataSet("CarsDataSet");

    // Make use of command builders to simplify data adapter configuration.
    private SqlCommandBuilder sqlCBInventory;
    private SqlCommandBuilder sqlCBCustomers;
    private SqlCommandBuilder sqlCBOrders;

    // Our data adapters (for each table).
    private SqlDataAdapter invTableAdapter;
    private SqlDataAdapter custTableAdapter;
    private SqlDataAdapter ordersTableAdapter;

    // Formwide connection object.
    private SqlConnection cn =
        new SqlConnection("server=(local);uid=sa;pwd=;database=Cars");
...
}
```

The Form's constructor does the grunge work of creating your data-centric member variables and filling the `DataSet`. Also note that there is a call to a private helper function, `BuildTableRelationship()`, as shown here:

```
public MainForm()
{
    InitializeComponent();

    // Create adapters.
    invTableAdapter = new SqlDataAdapter("Select * from Inventory", cn);
    custTableAdapter = new SqlDataAdapter("Select * from Customers", cn);
    ordersTableAdapter = new SqlDataAdapter("Select * from Orders", cn);

    // Autogenerate commands.
    sqlCBInventory = new SqlCommandBuilder(invTableAdapter);
    sqlCBOrders = new SqlCommandBuilder(ordersTableAdapter);
    sqlCBCustomers = new SqlCommandBuilder(custTableAdapter);

    // Add tables to DS.
    invTableAdapter.Fill(carsDS, "Inventory");
    custTableAdapter.Fill(carsDS, "Customers");
    ordersTableAdapter.Fill(carsDS, "Orders");

    // Build relations between tables.
    BuildTableRelationship();

    // Bind to grids.
    dataGridViewInventory.DataSource = carsDS.Tables["Inventory"];
    dataGridViewCustomers.DataSource = carsDS.Tables["Customers"];
    dataGridViewOrders.DataSource = carsDS.Tables["Orders"];
}
```

The `BuildTableRelationship()` helper function does just what you would expect. Recall that the Cars database expresses a number of parent/child relationships, accounted for with the following code:

```
private void BuildTableRelationship()
{
    // Create CustomerOrder data relation object.
    DataRelation dr = new DataRelation("CustomerOrder",
            carsDS.Tables["Customers"].Columns["CustID"],
            carsDS.Tables["Orders"].Columns["CustID"]);
    carsDS.Relations.Add(dr);

    // Create InventoryOrder data relation object.
    dr = new DataRelation("InventoryOrder",
            carsDS.Tables["Inventory"].Columns["CarID"],
            carsDS.Tables["Orders"].Columns["CarID"]);
    carsDS.Relations.Add(dr);
}
```

Now that the `DataSet` has been filled and disconnected from the data source, you can manipulate each table locally. To do so, simply insert, update, or delete values from any of the three `DataGridViews`. When you are ready to submit the data back for processing, click the Form's Update button. The code behind the `Click` event should be clear at this point:

```
private void btnUpdate_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    try
    {
        invTableAdapter.Update(carsDS, "Inventory");
        custTableAdapter.Update(carsDS, "Customers");
```

```
            ordersTableAdapter.Update(carsDS, "Orders");
        }
        catch (Exception ex)
        {
            MessageBox.Show(ex.Message);
        }
}
```

Once you update, you will find that each table in the Cars database has been correctly altered.

Navigating Between Related Tables

To illustrate how a `DataRelation` allows you to move between related tables programmatically, extend your GUI to include a new `Button` type and a related `TextBox`. The end user is able to enter the ID of a customer and obtain all the information about that customer's order, which is placed in a simple message box. The `Button`'s `Click` event handler is implemented as so:

```
private void btnGetInfo_Click(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
    string strInfo = "";
    DataRow drCust = null;
    DataRow[] drsOrder = null;

    // Get the specified CustID from the TextBox.
    int theCust = int.Parse(this.txtCustID.Text);

    // Now based on CustID, get the correct row in Customers table.
    drCust = carsDS.Tables["Customers"].Rows[theCust];
    strInfo += "Cust #" + drCust["CustID"].ToString() + "\n";

    // Navigate from customer table to order table.
    drsOrder = drCust.GetChildRows(carsDS.Relations["CustomerOrder"]);

    // Get order number.
    foreach (DataRow r in drsOrder)
        strInfo += "Order Number: " + r["OrderID"] + "\n";

    // Now navigate from order table to inventory table.
    DataRow[] drsInv =
        drsOrder[0].GetParentRows(carsDS.Relations["InventoryOrder"]);

    // Get Car info.
    foreach (DataRow r in drsInv)
    {
        strInfo += "Make: " + r["Make"] + "\n";
        strInfo += "Color: " + r["Color"] + "\n";
        strInfo += "Pet Name: " + r["PetName"] + "\n";
    }
    MessageBox.Show(strInfo, "Info based on cust ID");
}
```

As you can see, the key to moving between data tables is to use a handful of methods defined by the `DataRow` type. Let's break this code down step by step. First, you obtain the correct customer ID from the text box and use it to grab the correct row in the Customers table (using the `Rows` property, of course), as shown here:

```
// Get the specified CustID from the TextBox.
int theCust = int.Parse(this.txtCustID.Text);
// Now based on CustID, get the correct row in the Customers table.
DataRow drCust = null;
drCust = carsDS.Tables["Customers"].Rows[theCust];
strInfo += "Cust #" + drCust["CustID"].ToString() + "\n";
```

Next, you navigate from the Customers table to the Orders table, using the CustomerOrder data relation. Notice that the `DataRow.GetChildRows()` method allows you to grab rows from your child table. Once you do, you can read information out of the table:

```
// Navigate from customer table to order table.
DataRow[] drsOrder = null;
drsOrder =   drCust.GetChildRows(carsDS.Relations["CustomerOrder"]);
// Get order number.
foreach(DataRow r in drsOrder)
strInfo += "Order Number: " + r["OrderID"] + "\n";
```

Your final step is to navigate from the Orders table to its parent table (Inventory), using the `GetParentRows()` method. At this point, you can read information from the Inventory table using the Make, PetName, and Color columns, as shown here:

```
// Now navigate from order table to inventory table.
DataRow[] drsInv =
     drsOrder[0].GetParentRows(carsDS.Relations["InventoryOrder"]);
foreach(DataRow r in drsInv)
{
     strInfo += "Make: " + r["Make"] + "\n";
     strInfo += "Color: " + r["Color"] + "\n";
     strInfo += "Pet Name: " + r["PetName"] + "\n";
}
```

Figure 22-21 shows one possible output.



Figure 22-21. *Navigating data relations*

Hopefully, this last example has you convinced of the usefulness of the `DataSet` type. Given that a `DataSet` is completely disconnected from the underlying data source, you can work with an in-memory copy of data and navigate around each table to make any necessary updates, deletes, or inserts. Once you've finished, you can then submit your changes to the data store for processing.

■ **Source Code** The MultitabledDataSetApp project is included under the Chapter 22 subdirectory.

We're Off to See the (Data) Wizard

At this point in the chapter, you have seen numerous ways to interact with the types of ADO.NET in a "wizard-free" manner. While it is (most definitely) true that understanding the ins and outs of working with your data provider is quite important, it is also true that this can lead to hand cramps from typing the large amount of boilerplate code. To wrap things up, therefore, I'd like to point out a few data-centric wizards you may wish to make use of.

Be aware that I have *no* intention of commenting on all of the UI-centric data wizards provided by Visual Studio 2005, but to illustrate the basics, let's examine some additional configuration options of the `DataGridView` widget. Assume you have created a new Windows Forms application that has a single Form containing a `DataGridView` control named `inventoryDataGridView`. Using the designer, activate the inline editor for this widget, and from the Choose Data Source drop-down listbox, click the Add Project Data Source link (see Figure 22-22).

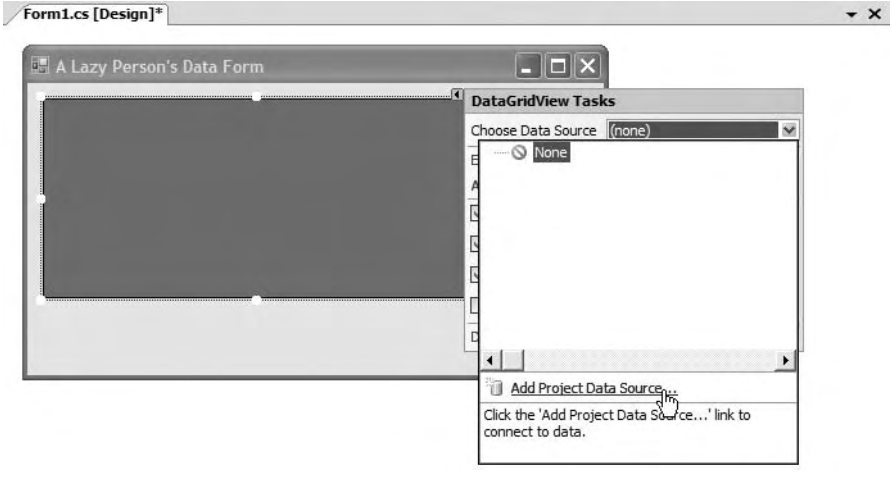


Figure 22-22. *Adding a data source*

This will launch the Data Source Configuration Wizard. On the first step, simply select the Database icon and click Next. On the second step, click New Connection and establish a connection to the Cars database (using the same set of steps described earlier in this chapter within the "Connecting to the Cars Database from Visual Studio 2005" section). The third step allows you to inform the wizard to store the connection string within an external `App.config` file (which is generally a good idea) within a properly configured `<connectionStrings>` element. As the final step, you are able to select which database objects you wish to account for within the generated `DataSet`, which for your purposes here will simply be the Inventory table (see Figure 22-23).

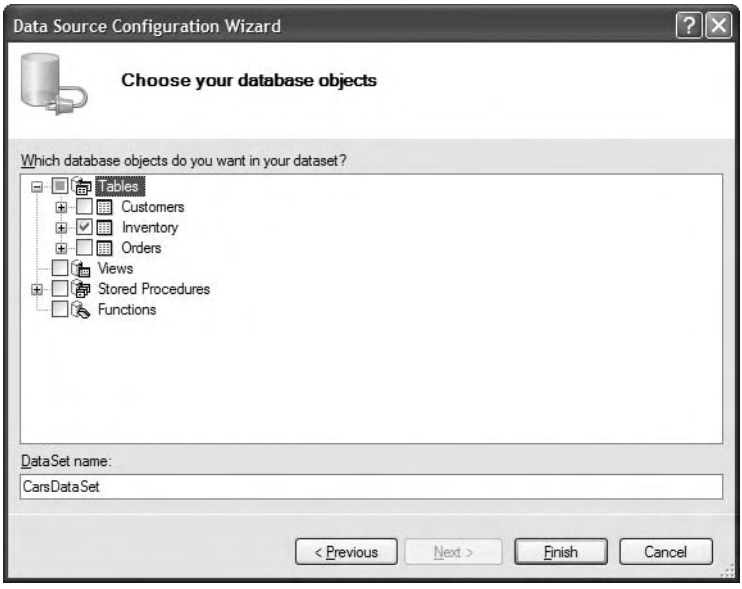


Figure 22-23. *Selecting the Inventory table*

Once you complete the wizard, you will notice that the `DataGridView` automatically displays the column names within the designer. In fact, if you run your application as is, you will find the contents of the Inventory table displayed within the grid's UI. If you were to examine the code placed in your Form's `Load` event, you would find that the grid is populated with the line of code highlighted in bold:

```
public partial class MainForm : Form
{
    public MainForm()
    {
        InitializeComponent();
    }

    private void MainForm_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // TODO: This line of code loads data into
        // the 'carsDataSet.Inventory' table.
        // You can move, or remove it, as needed.
        this.inventoryTableAdapter.Fill(this.carsDataSet.Inventory);
    }
}
```

To understand what this line of code is in fact doing, you need to first understand the role of strongly typed `DataSet` objects.

Strongly Typed DataSets

Strongly typed `DataSets` (as the name implies) allow you to interact with a `DataSet`'s internal tables using database-specific properties, methods, and events, rather than via the generalized `Tables` property. If you activate the View ➤ Class View menu option of Visual Studio 2005, you will find that

the wizard has created a new type deriving from `DataSet` named `CarsDataSet`. As you can see in Figure 22-24, this class type defines a number of members that allow you select, modify, and update its contents.

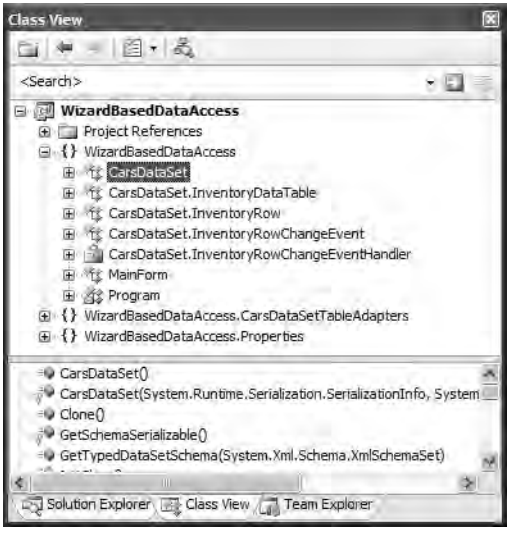


Figure 22-24. *The strongly typed* `DataSet`

Once the wizard completes its task, it places a member variable of type `CarDataSet` within your Form's `*.Designer.cs` file (which is the same member variable manipulated in the `Load` event of your Form):

```
partial class MainForm
{
...
     private CarsDataSet carsDataSet;
}
```

The Autogenerated Data Component

In addition to the strongly typed `DataSet`, the wizard generated a data component (named `InventoryTableAdapter` in this case) that encapsulates the underlying data connection, data adapter, and command objects used to interact with the Inventory table:

```
public partial class InventoryTableAdapter : System.ComponentModel.Component
{
    // field data for data access.
    private System.Data.SqlClient.SqlDataAdapter m_adapter;
    private System.Data.SqlClient.SqlConnection m_connection;
    private System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand[] m_commandCollection;
...
}
```

As well, this component defines custom `Fill()` and `Update()` methods that are tailor-made to operate on your `CarsDataSet`, in addition to a set of members used to insert, update, or delete row

data from the internal Inventory table. I'll leave it up to interested readers to dive into the implementation details of each member. The good news is that after all your work in this chapter, the code behind each member should look quite familiar.

■ **Note** If you are interested in taking a deeper look at the ADO.NET object model, including the numerous Visual Studio 2005 designers, check out *Pro ADO.NET 2.0* by Sahil Malik (Apress, 2005).

Summary

ADO.NET is a new data access technology developed with the disconnected *n*-tier application firmly in mind. The `System.Data` namespace contains most of the core types you need to programmatically interact with rows, columns, tables, and views. As you have seen, the .NET platform ships with numerous data providers that allow you to leverage the connected and disconnected layers of ADO.NET.

Using connection objects, command objects, and data reader objects of the connected layer, you are able to select, update, insert, and delete records. As you have seen, command objects support an internal parameter collection, which can be used to add some type safety to your SQL queries and are quite helpful when triggering stored procedures.

The centerpiece of the disconnected layer is the `DataSet`. This type is an in-memory representation of any number of tables and any number of optional interrelationships, constraints, and expressions. The beauty of establishing relations on your local tables is that you are able to programmatically navigate between them while disconnected from the remote data store.

You also examined the role of the data adapter in this chapter. Using this type (and the related `SelectCommand`, `InsertCommand`, `UpdateCommand`, and `DeleteCommand` properties), the adapter can resolve changes in the `DataSet` with the original data store. Also, you learned about the connected layer of ADO.NET and came to understand the role of data reader types.

PART 5



Web Applications and XML Web Services

CHAPTER 23

ASP.NET 2.0 Web Pages and Web Controls

Until now, all of the example applications in this text have focused on console-based and Windows Forms front ends. In this chapter and the next, you'll explore how the .NET platform facilitates the construction of browser-based presentation layers. To begin, you'll quickly review a number of key web-centric concepts (HTTP, HTML, client-side, and server-side script) and the role of the web server (including the ASP.NET development server, `WebDev.WebServer.exe`).

With this web primer out of the way, the remainder of this chapter concentrates on the composition of ASP.NET (including the enhanced code-behind model) and how to work with ASP.NET web controls. As you will see, ASP.NET 2.0 provides a number of new web controls, a new "master page" model, and various customization techniques.

The Role of HTTP

Web applications are very different animals from traditional desktop applications (to say the least). The first obvious difference is that a production-level web application will always involve at least two networked machines (of course, during development it is entirely possible to have a single machine play the role of both client and server). Given this fact, the machines in question must agree upon a particular wire protocol to determine how to send and receive data. The wire protocol that connects the computers in question is the *Hypertext Transfer Protocol* (*HTTP*).

When a client machine launches a web browser (such as Netscape Navigator, Mozilla Firefox, or Microsoft Internet Explorer), an HTTP request is made to access a particular resource (such as an `*.aspx` or `*.htm` file) on the remote server machine. HTTP is a text-based protocol that is built upon a standard request/response paradigm. For example, if you navigate to `http://www.IntertechTraining.com`, the browser software leverages a web technology termed *Domain Name Service* (*DNS*) that converts the registered URL into a four-part, 32-bit numerical value (aka an IP address). At this point, the browser opens a socket connection (typically via port 80) and sends the HTTP request for the default page at the `http://www.IntertechTraining.com` website.

Once the hosting web server receives the incoming HTTP request, the specified resource may contain logic that scrapes out any client-supplied input values (such as values within a text box) in order to format a proper HTTP response. Web programmers may leverage any number of technologies (CGI, ASP, ASP.NET, Java servlets, etc.) to dynamically generate the content to be emitted into the HTTP response. At this point, the client-side browser renders the HTML emitted from the web server. Figure 23-1 illustrates the basic HTTP request/response cycle.

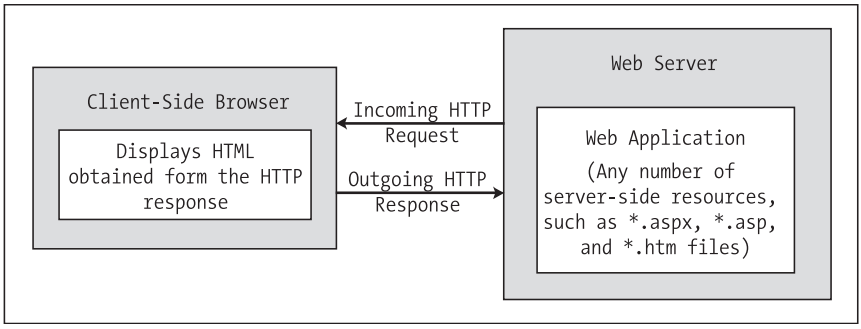

Web Server
Client-Side Browser
Displays HTML obtained form the HTTP response
Incoming HTTP Request
Outgoing HTTP Response
Web Application
(Any number of server-side resources, such as *.aspx, *.asp, and *.htm files)

Figure 23-1. *The HTTP request and response cycle*

Another aspect of web development that is markedly different from traditional desktop programming is the fact that HTTP is an essentially *stateless* wire protocol. As soon as the web server emits a response to the client, everything about the previous interaction is forgotten. Therefore, as a web developer, it is up to you take specific steps to "remember" information (such as items in a shopping cart) about the clients who are currently logged on to your site. As you will see in the next chapter, ASP.NET provides numerous ways to handle state, many of which are commonplace to any web platform (session variables, cookies, and application variables) as well as some new techniques (view state, control state, and the cache).

Understanding Web Applications and Web Servers

A *web application* can be understood as a collection of files (`*.htm`, `*.asp`, `*.aspx`, image files, etc.) and related components (such as a .NET code library) stored within a particular set of directories on a given web server. As shown in Chapter 24, web applications have a specific life cycle and provide numerous events (such as initial startup or final shutdown) that you can hook into.

A *web server* is a software product in charge of hosting your web applications, and it typically provides a number of related services such as integrated security, File Transfer Protocol (FTP) support, mail exchange services, and so forth. Internet Information Server (IIS) is Microsoft's enterprise-level web server product, and as you would guess, it has intrinsic support for classic ASP as well as ASP.NET web applications.

When you build ASP.NET web applications, you will often need to interact with IIS. Be aware, however, that IIS is *not* automatically selected when you install the Windows Server 2003 or Windows XP Professional Edition (you can't install IIS on the Home editions of Windows). Therefore, depending on the configuration of your development machine, you may be required to manually install IIS before proceeding through this chapter. To do so, simply access the Add/Remove Program applet from the Control Panel folder and select Add/Remove Windows Components.

■ **Note** Ideally, your development machine will have IIS installed *before* you install the .NET Framework. If you install IIS *after* you install the .NET Framework, none of your ASP.NET web applications will execute correctly (you will simply get back a blank page). Luckily, you can reconfigure IIS to host .NET applications by running the `aspnet_regiis.exe` command-line tool (using the `/i` flag).

Assuming you have IIS properly installed on your workstation, you can interact with IIS from the Administrative Tools folder (located in the Control Panel folder). For the purposes of this chapter, you are concerned only with the Default Web Site node (see Figure 23-2).

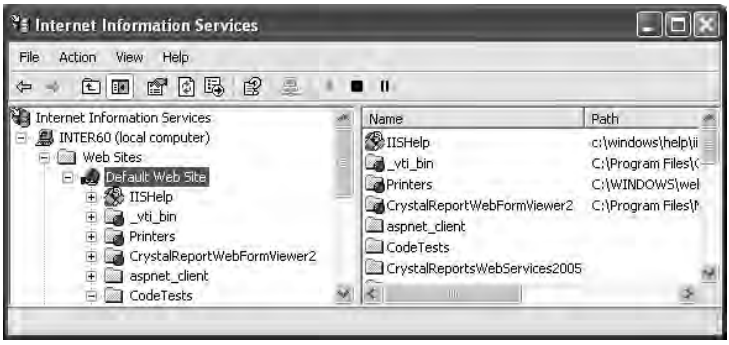


Figure 23-2. *The IIS applet*

Working with IIS Virtual Directories

A single IIS installation is able to host numerous web applications, each of which resides in a *virtual directory*. Each virtual directory is mapped to a physical directory on the local hard drive. Therefore, if you create a new virtual directory named CarsRUs, the outside world can navigate to this site using a URL such as `http://www.CarsRUs.com` (assuming your site's IP address has been registered with the world at large). Under the hood, the virtual directory maps to a physical root directory such as C:\inetpub\wwwroot\AspNetCarsSite, which contains the content of the web application.

When you create ASP.NET web applications using Visual Studio 2005, you have the option of generating a new virtual directory for the current website. However, you are also able to manually create a virtual directory by hand. For the sake of illustration, assume you wish to create a simple web application named Cars. The first step is to create a new folder on your machine to hold the collection of files that constitute this new site (e.g., C:\CodeTests\CarsWebSite).

Next, you need to create a new virtual directory to host the Cars site. Simply right-click the Default Web Site node of IIS and select New ➤ Virtual Directory from the context menu. This menu selection launches an integrated wizard. Skip past the welcome screen and give your website a name (Cars). Next, you are asked to specify the physical folder on your hard drive that contains the various files and images that represent this site (in this case, C:\CodeTests\CarsWebSite).

The final step of the wizard prompts you for some basic traits about your new virtual directory (such as read/write access to the files it contains, the ability to view these files from a web browser, the ability to launch executables [e.g., CGI applications], etc.). For this example, the default selections are just fine (be aware that you can always modify your selections after running this tool using various right-click Property dialog boxes integrated within IIS). When you are finished, you will see that your new virtual directory has been registered with IIS (see Figure 23-3).



Figure 23-3. *The Cars virtual directory*

The ASP.NET 2.0 Development Server

ASP.NET 2.0 ships with a lightweight web server named `WebDev.WebServer.exe`. This utility allows developers host an ASP.NET 2.0 web application outside the bounds of IIS. Using this tool, you can build and test your web pages from any directory on your machine (which is quite helpful for team development scenarios and for building ASP.NET 2.0 web programs on Windows XP Home Edition, which does not support IIS).

■ **Note** `WebDev.WebServer.exe` cannot be used to test classic ASP web applications.

When building a website with Visual Studio 2005, you have the option of using `WebDev.WebServer.exe` to host your pages. However, you are also able to manually interact with this tool from a .NET command prompt. If you enter the following command:

```
WebDev.WebServer.exe -?
```

you will be presented with a message box that describes the valid command-line options. In a nutshell, you will need to specify an unused port (via the `/port:` option), the root directory of the web application (via the `/path:` option), and an optional virtual path using the `/vpath:` option (if you do not supply a `/vpath:` option, the default is simply `/`). Consider the following usage:

```
WebDev.WebServer.exe /port:12345 /path:"C:\CodeTests\CarsWebSite"
```

Once you have entered this command, you can launch your web browser of choice to request pages. Thus, if the CarsWebSite folder had a file named `MyPage.aspx`, you could enter the following URL:

```
http://localhost:12345/CarsWebSite/MyPage.aspx
```

Many of the examples in this chapter and the next will make use of `WebDev.WebServer.exe` via Visual Studio 2005. Be aware that this web server is *not* intended to host production-level web applications. It is purely intended for development and testing purposes.

■ **Note** The Mono project (see Chapter 1) provides a free ASP.NET plug-in for the Apache web server. Check out `http://www.mono-project.com/ASP.NET` for details.

The Role of HTML

Once you have configured a directory to host your web application, you need to create the content itself. Recall that *web application* is simply the term given to the set of files that constitute the functionality of the site. To be sure, a vast number of these files will contain syntactic tokens defined by the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). HTML is a standard markup language used to describe how literal text, images, external links, and various HTML-based GUI widgets are rendered by the client-side browser.

This particular aspect of web development is one of the major reasons why many programmers dislike building web-based programs. While it is true that modern IDEs (including Visual Studio 2005) and web development platforms (such as ASP.NET) generate much of the HTML automatically, you will do well to have a working knowledge of HTML as you work with ASP.NET. While this section will most certainly not cover all aspects of HTML (by any means), let's check out some basics.

HTML Document Structure

An HTML file consists of a set of tags that describe the look and feel of a given web page. As you would expect, the basic structure of an HTML document tends to remain the same. For example, `*.htm` files (or, alternatively, `*.html` files) open and close with `<html>` and `</html>` tags, typically define a `<body>` section, and so forth. Keep in mind that HTML is *not* case sensitive. Therefore, in the eyes of the hosting browser, `<HTML>`, `<html>`, and `<Html>` are identical.

To illustrate some HTML basics, open Visual Studio 2005, insert an empty HTML file using the File ➤ New ➤ File menu selection, and save this file under your C:\CodeTests\CarsWebSite directory as `default.htm`. As you can see, the initial markup is uneventful:

```
<html>
<body>
</body>
</html>
```

The `<html>` and `</html>` tags are used to mark the beginning and end of your document. As you may guess, web browsers use these tags to understand where to begin applying the rendering formats specified in the body of the document. The `<body>` scope is where the vast majority of the actual content is defined. To spruce things up just a bit, define a title for your page as so:

```
<html>
<head>
  <title>This Is the Cars Website</title>
</head>
<body>
</body>
</html>
```

As you would guess, the `<title>` tags are used to specify the text string that should be placed in the title bar of the calling web browser.

HTML Form Development

The real action of an `*.htm` file occurs within the scope of the `<form>` elements. An *HTML form* is simply a named group of related UI elements used to gather user input, which is then transmitted to the web application via HTTP. Do not confuse an HTML form with the entire display area shown by a given browser. In reality, an HTML form is more of a *logical grouping* of widgets placed in the `<form>` and `</form>` tag set:

```
<html>
<head>
  <title>This Is the Cars Web Site</title>
</head>
<body>
  <form id="defaultPage" name="defaultPage">
    <!-- Insert web content here ->
  </form>
</body>
</html>
```

This form has been assigned the ID and name of "defaultPage". Typically, the opening `<form>` tag supplies an `action` attribute that specifies the URL to which to submit the form data, as well as the method of transmitting that data itself (`POST` or `GET`). You will examine this aspect of the `<form>`

tag in just a bit. For the time being, let's look at the sorts of items that can be placed in an HTML form. Visual Studio 2005 provides an HTML tab on the Toolbox that allows you to select each HTML-based UI widget (see Figure 23-4).

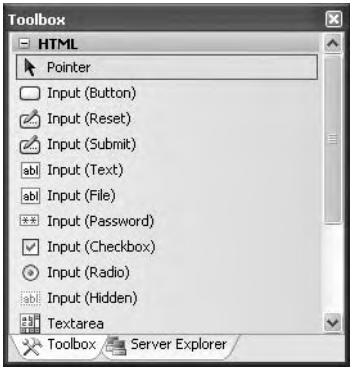


Figure 23-4. *The HTML controls tab of the Toolbox*

Building an HTML-Based User Interface

Before you add the HTML widgets to the HTML `<form>`, it is worth pointing out that Visual Studio 2005 allows you to edit the overall look and feel of the `*.htm` file itself using the integrated HTML designer and the Properties window. If you select DOCUMENT from the Properties window (see Figure 23-5), you are able to configure various aspects of the HTML page, such as the background color.

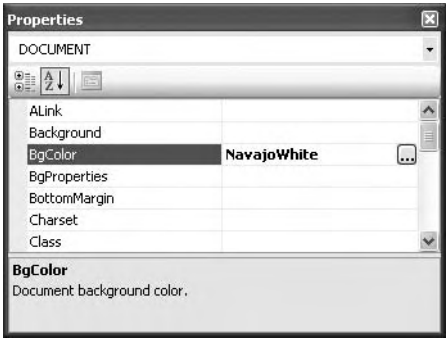


Figure 23-5. *Editing an HTML document via VS .NET*

Now, update the `<body>` of the `default.htm` file to display some literal text that prompts the user to enter a user name and password, and choose a background color of your liking (be aware that you can enter and format textual content by typing directly on the HTML designer):

```
<html>
<head>
    <title>This Is the Cars Website</title>
```

```
</head>
<body bgcolor="NavajoWhite">
    <!-- Prompt for user input-->
    <h1 align="center">
      The Cars Login Page</h1>
    <p align="center"> <br>
      Please enter your <i>user name</i> and <i>password</i>.</p>
  <form id="defaultPage" name="defaultPage">
  </form>
</body>
</html>
```

Now let's build the HTML form itself. In general, each HTML widget is described using a `name` attribute (used to identify the item programmatically) and a `type` attribute (used to specify which UI element you are interested in placing in the `<form>` declaration). Depending on which UI widget you manipulate, you will find additional attributes specific to that particular item that can be modified using the Properties window.

The UI you will build here will contain two text fields (one of which is a `Password` widget) and two button types (one to submit the form data and the other to reset the form data to the default values):

```
<!-- Build a form to get user info -->
<form name="defaultPage" id="defaultPage">
  <P align="center">User Name:
  <input id="txtUserName" type="text" NAME="txtUserName"></P>
  <P align="center">Password:
    <input name="txtPassword" type="password" ID="txtPassword"></P>
  <P align="center">
   <input name="btnSubmit" type="submit" value="Submit" ID="btnSubmit">
   <input name="btnReset" type="reset" value="Reset" ID="btnReset">
  </P>
</form>
```

Notice that you have assigned relevant names and IDs to each widget (`txtUserName`, `txtPassword`, `btnSubmit`, and `btnReset`). Of greater importance, note that each input item has an extra attribute named `type` that marks these buttons as UI items that automatically clear all fields to their initial values (`type = "reset"`), mask the input as a password (`type="password"`), or send the form data to the recipient (`type = "submit"`). Figure 23-6 displays the page thus far.



Figure 23-6. *The initial crack at the* `default.htm` *page*

The Role of Client-Side Scripting

A given `*.htm` file may contain blocks of script code that will be emitted in the response stream and processed by the requesting browser. There are two major reasons why client-side scripting is used:

- To validate user input before posting back to the web server
- To interact with the Document Object Model (DOM) of the target browser

Regarding the first point, understand that the inherent evil of a web application is the need to make frequent round-trips (aka postbacks) to the server machine to update the HTML rendered into the browser. While postbacks are unavoidable, you should always be mindful of ways to minimize travel across the wire. One technique that saves round-trips is to use client-side scripting to validate user input before submitting the form data to the web server. If an error is found (such as not specifying data within a required field), you can prompt the user of the error without incurring the cost of posting back to the web server. (After all, nothing is more annoying to users than posting back on a slow connection, only to receive instructions to address input errors!)

In addition to validating user input, client-side scripts can also be used to interact with the underlying object model (the DOM) of the browser itself. Most commercial browsers expose a set of objects that can be leveraged to control how the browser should behave. One major annoyance is the fact that different browsers tend to expose similar, but not identical, object models. Thus, if you emit a block of client-side script code that interacts with the DOM, it may not work identically on all browsers.

■ **Note** ASP.NET provides the `HttpRequest.Browser` property, which allows you to determine at runtime the capacities of the browser that sent the current request.

There are many scripting languages that can be used to author client-side script code. Two of the more popular are VBScript and JavaScript. VBScript is a subset of the Visual Basic 6.0 programming language. Be aware that Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) is the only web browser that has built-in support for client-side VBScript support. Thus, if you wish your HTML pages to work correctly in any commercial web browser, do *not* use VBScript for your client-side scripting logic.

The other popular scripting language is JavaScript. Be very aware that JavaScript is in no way, shape, or form a subset of the Java language. While JavaScript and Java have a somewhat similar syntax, JavaScript is not a full-fledged OOP language, and thus is far less powerful than Java. The good news is that all modern-day web browsers support JavaScript, which makes it a natural candidate for client-side scripting logic.

■ **Note** To further confuse the issue, recall that JScript .NET is a managed language that can be used to build valid .NET assemblies using a scripting like syntax.

A Client-Side Scripting Example

To illustrate the role of client-side scripting, let's first examine how to intercept events sent from client-side HTML GUI widgets. Assume you have added an HTML `Button` (`btnHelp`) type to your `default.htm` page that allows the user to view help information. To capture the `Click` event for this button, activate the HTML view and select your button from the left drop-down list. Using the right drop-down list, select the `onclick` event. This will add an `onclick` attribute to the definition of the new `Button` type:

```
<input id="btnHelp" type="button" value="Help" language="javascript"
onclick="return btnHelp_onclick()" />
```

Visual Studio 2005 will also create an empty JavaScript function that will be called when the user clicks the button. Within this stub, simply make use of the `alert()` method to display a client-side message box:

```
<script language="javascript" type="text/javascript">
<!--
function btnHelp_onclick() {
    alert("Dude, it is not that hard.  Click the darn Submit button!");
}
// -->
</script>
```

Note that the scripting block has been wrapped within HTML comments (`<!-- -->`). The reason is simple. If your page ends up on a browser that does not support JavaScript, the code will be treated as a comment block and ignored. Of course, your page may be less functional, but the upside is that your page will not blow up when rendered by the browser.

Validating the default.htm Form Data

Now, let's update the `default.htm` page to support some client-side validation logic. The goal is to ensure that when the user clicks the Submit button, you call a JavaScript function that checks each text box for empty values. If this is the case, you pop up an alert that instructs the user to enter the required data. First, handle an `onclick` event for the Submit button:

```
<input name="btnSubmit" type="submit" value="Submit" id="btnSubmit"
language="javascript" onclick="return btnSubmit_onclick()">
```

Implement this handler as so:

```
function btnSubmit_onclick(){
     // If they forget either item, pop up a message box.
     if((defaultPage.txtUserName.value == "") ||
     (defaultPage.txtPassword.value == ""))
     {
          alert("You must supply a user name and password!");
          return false;
     }
     return true;
}
```

At this point, you can open your browser of choice and navigate to the `default.htm` page hosted by your Cars virtual directory and test out your client-side script logic:

```
http://localhost/Cars/default.htm
```

Submitting the Form Data (GET and POST)

Now that you have a simple HTML page, you need to examine how to transmit the form data back to the web server for processing. When you build an HTML form, you typically supply an `action` attribute on the opening `<form>` tag to specify the recipient of the incoming form data. Possible receivers include mail servers, other HTML files, an Active Server Pages (ASP; classic or .NET) file, and so forth. For this example, you'll use a classic ASP file named `ClassicAspPage.asp`. Update your `default.htm` file by specifying the following attribute in the opening `<form>` tag:

```
<form name="defaultPage" id="defaultPage"
  action="http://localhost/Cars/ClassicAspPage.asp" method = "GET">
     ...
</form>
```

These extra attributes ensure that when the Submit button for this form is clicked, the form data should be sent to the `ClassicAspPage.asp` at the specified URL. When you specify `method = "GET"` as the mode of transmission, the form data is appended to the query string as a set of name/value pairs separated by ampersands:

```
http://localhost/Cars/ClassicAspPage.asp?txtUserName=
Andrew&txtPassword=abcd123$&btnSubmit=Submit
```

The other method of transmitting form data to the web server is to specify `method = "POST"`:

```
< form name="defaultPage" id="defaultPage"
  action="http://localhost/Cars/ClassicAspPage.asp" method = "POST">
     ...
</form>
```

In this case, the form data is not appended to the query string, but instead is written to a separate line within the HTTP header. Using `POST`, the form data is not directly visible to the outside world. More important, `POST` data does not have a character-length limitation (many browsers have a limit for `GET` queries). For the time being, make use of HTTP `GET` to send the form data to the receiving `*.asp` page.

Building a Classic ASP Page

A classic ASP page is a hodgepodge of HTML and server-side script code. If you have never worked with classic ASP, understand that the goal of ASP is to dynamically build HTML on the fly using *server-side* script and a small set of classic COM objects. For example, you may have a server-side VBScript (or JavaScript) block that reads a table from a data source using classic ADO and returns the rows as a generic HTML table.

For this example, the ASP page uses the intrinsic ASP Request COM object to read the values of the incoming form data (appended to the query string) and echo them back to the caller (not terribly exciting, but it makes the point). The server-side script logic will make use of VBScript (as denoted by the `language` directive).

To do so, create a new HTML file using Visual Studio .NET and save this file under the name `ClassicAspPage.asp` into the folder to which your virtual directory has been mapped (e.g., C:\CodeTests\CarsWebSite). Implement this page as so:

```
<%@ language="VBScript" %>
<html>
<head>
    <title>The Cars Page</title>
</head>
 <body>
    <h1 align="center">Here is what you sent me:</h1>
    <P align="center"> <b>User Name: </b>
    <%= Request.QueryString("txtUserName") %> <br>
    <b>Password: </b>
    <%= Request.QueryString("txtPassword") %> <br>
    </P>
</body>
</html>
```

Here, you use the classic ASP `Request` COM object to call the `QueryString()` method to examine the values contained in each HTML widget submitted via `method = "GET"`. The `<%= ...%>` notation is a shorthand way of saying, "Insert the following directly into the outbound HTTP response." To gain a finer level of flexibility, you could interact with the ASP Response COM object within a full script block (denoted by the `<%, %>` notation). You have no need to do so here; however, the following is a simple example:

```
<%
  Dim pwd
  pwd = Request.QueryString("txtPassword")
  Response.Write(pwd)
%>
```

Obviously, the `Request` and `Response` objects of classic ASP provide a number of additional members beyond those shown here. Furthermore, classic ASP also defines a small number of additional COM objects (`Session`, `Server`, `Application`, and so on) that you can use while constructing your web application.

■ **Note** Under ASP.NET, these COM objects are officially dead. However, you will see that the `System.Web.UI.Page` base class defines identically named properties that expose objects with similar functionality.

To test the ASP logic, simply load the `default.htm` page from a browser and submit the form data. Once the script is processed on the web server, you are returned a brand new (dynamically generated) HTML display (see Figure 23-7).



Figure 23-7. *The dynamically generated HTML*

Responding to POST Submissions

Currently, your `default.htm` file specifies HTTP `GET` as the method of sending the form data to the target `*.asp` file. Using this approach, the values contained in the various GUI widgets are appended to the end of the query string. It is important to note that the ASP `Request.QueryString()` method is *only* able to extract data submitted via the `GET` method.

If you would rather submit form data to the web resource using HTTP `POST`, you can use the `Request.Form` collection to read the values on the server, for example:

```
<body>
    <h1 align="center">Here is what you sent me:</h1>
    <P align="center">
        <b>User Name: </b>
        <%= Request.Form("txtUserName") %> <br>
        <b>Password: </b>
        <%= Request.Form("txtPassword") %> <br>
    </P>
</body>
```

That wraps up our web development primer. Hopefully, if you're new to web development you now have a better understanding of the basic building blocks. Before we check out how the .NET platform improves upon the current state of affairs, let's take a brief moment to bash (which is to say, "critique") classic ASP.

■ **Source Code** The ClassicAspCars example is included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

Problems with Classic ASP

While many successful websites have been created using classic ASP, this architecture is not without its downsides. Perhaps the biggest downfall of classic ASP is the same thing that makes it a powerful platform: server-side scripting languages. Scripting languages such as VBScript and JavaScript are interpreted, typeless entities that do not lend themselves to robust OO programming techniques.

Another problem with classic ASP is the fact that an `*.asp` page does not yield very modularized code. Given that ASP is a blend of HTML and script in a *single* page, most ASP web applications are a confused mix of two very different programming techniques. While it is true that classic ASP allows you to partition reusable code into distinct include files, the underlying object model does not support true separation of concerns. In an ideal world, a web framework would allow the presentation logic (i.e., HTML tags) to exist independently from the business logic (i.e., functional code).

A final issue to consider here is the fact that classic ASP demands a good deal of boilerplate, redundant script code that tends to repeat between projects. Almost all web applications need to validate user input, repopulate the state of HTML widgets before emitting the HTTP response, generate an HTML table of data, and so forth.

Major Benefits of ASP.NET 1.*x*

The first major release of ASP.NET (version 1.*x*) did a fantastic job of addressing each of the limitations found with classic ASP. In a nutshell, the .NET platform brought about the following techniques:

- ASP.NET 1.*x* provides a model termed *code-behind*, which allows you to separate presentation logic from business logic.
- ASP.NET 1.*x* pages are compiled .NET assemblies, not interpreted scripting languages, which translates into much faster execution.
- Web controls allow programmers to build the GUI of a web application in a manner similar to building a Windows Forms application.
- ASP.NET web controls automatically maintain their state during postbacks using a hidden form field named `__VIEWSTATE`.

- ASP.NET web applications are completely object-oriented and make use of the CTS.
- ASP.NET web applications can be easily configured using standard IIS settings *or* using a web application configuration file (`Web.config`).

While ASP.NET 1.*x* was a major step in the right direction, ASP.NET 2.0 provides even more bells and whistles.

Major Enhancements of ASP.NET 2.0

ASP.NET 2.0 provides a number of new namespaces, types, utilities, and technologies to the .NET web development landscape. Consider this partial list:

- ASP.NET 2.0 no longer requires websites to be hosted under IIS during the testing and development of your site. You are now able to host your site from any directory on the hard drive.
- ASP.NET 2.0 ships with a large number of new web controls (security controls, new data controls, new UI controls, etc.) that complement the existing ASP.NET 1.*x* control set.
- ASP.NET 2.0 supports the use of *master pages*, which allow you to attach a common UI frame to a set of related pages.
- ASP.NET 2.0 supports *themes*, which offer a declarative manner to change the look and feel of the entire web application.
- ASP.NET 2.0 supports *web parts*, which can be used to allow end users to customize the look and feel of a web page.
- ASP.NET 2.0 supports a web-based configuration and management utility that maintains your `Web.config` files.

The truth of the matter is that if I were to truly do justice to every aspect of ASP.NET 2.0, this book would double in size. Given that this book is not focused exclusively on web development, be sure to consult the .NET Framework 2.0 documentation for details of topics not covered here.

The ASP.NET 2.0 Namespaces

As of .NET 2.0, there are no fewer than *34* web-centric namespaces in the base class libraries. From a high level, these namespaces can be grouped into four major categories:

- Core functionality (e.g., types that allow you to interact with the HTTP request and response, Web Form infrastructure, theme and profiling support, web parts, etc.)
- Web Form and HTML controls
- Mobile web development
- XML web services

This text will not examine the topic of mobile .NET development (web-based or otherwise); however, the role of XML web services will be examined in Chapter 25. Table 23-1 describes several of the core ASP.NET 2.0 namespaces.

Table 23-1. *ASP.NET Web-centric Namespaces*

Namespaces	Meaning in Life
`System.Web`	Defines types that enable browser/web server communication (such as request and response capabilities, cookie manipulation, and file transfer)
`System.Web.Caching`	Defines types that facilitate caching support for a web application
`System.Web.Hosting`	Defines types that allow you to build custom hosts for the ASP.NET runtime
`System.Web.Management`	Defines types for managing and monitoring the health of an ASP.NET web application
`System.Web.Profile`	Defines types that are used to implement ASP.NET user profiles
`System.Web.Security`	Defines types that allow you to programmatically secure your site
`System.Web.SessionState`	Defines types that allow you to maintain stateful information on a per-user basis (e.g., session state variables)

`System.Web.UI`
`System.Web.UI.WebControls`
`System.Web.UI.HtmlControls`
	Define a number of types that allow you to build a GUI front end for your web application

The ASP.NET Web Page Code Model

ASP.NET web pages can be constructed using one of two approaches. You are free to create a single `*.aspx` file that contains a blend of server-side code and HTML (much like classic ASP). Using the single-file page model, server-side code is placed within a `<script>` scope, but the code itself is *not* script code proper (e.g., VBScript/JavaScript). Rather, the code statements within a `<script>` block are written in your managed language of choice (C#, Visual Basic .NET, etc).

If you are building a page that contains very little code (but a good deal of HTML), a single-file page model may be easier to work with, as you can see the code and the markup in one unified `*.aspx` file. In addition, crunching your code and HTML into a single `*.aspx` file provides a few other advantages:

- Pages written using the single-file model are slightly easier to deploy or to send to another developer.
- Because there is no dependency between files, a single-file page is easier to rename.
- Managing files in a source code control system is slightly easier, as all the action is taking place in a single file.

The default approach taken by Visual Studio 2005 (when creating a new website solution) is to make use of a technique termed *code-behind*, which allows you to separate your programming code from your HTML presentation logic using two distinct files. This model works quite well when your pages contain significant amounts of code or when multiple developers are working on the same website. The code-behind model offers a few additional benefits as well:

- Because code-behind pages offer a clean separation of HTML markup and code, it is possible to have designers working on the markup while programmers author the C# code.
- Code is not exposed to page designers or others who are working only with the page markup (as you might guess, HTML folks are not always interested in viewing reams of C# code).
- Code files can be used across multiple `*.aspx` files.

Regardless of which approach you take, do know that there is *no* difference in terms of performance. Also be aware that the single-file `*.aspx` model is no longer considered *evil* as proclaimed in .NET 1.*x*. In fact, many ASP.NET 2.0 web applications will benefit by building sites that make use of both approaches.

Working with the Single-File Page Model

First up, let's examine the single-file page model. Our goal is to build an `*.aspx` file (named `Default.aspx`) that displays the Inventory table of the Cars database (created in Chapter 22). While you could build this page using nothing but Notepad, Visual Studio 2005 can simplify matters via IntelliSense, code completion, and a visual page designer.

To begin, open Visual Studio 2005 and create a new Web Form using the File ➤ New ➤ File menu option (see Figure 23-8).

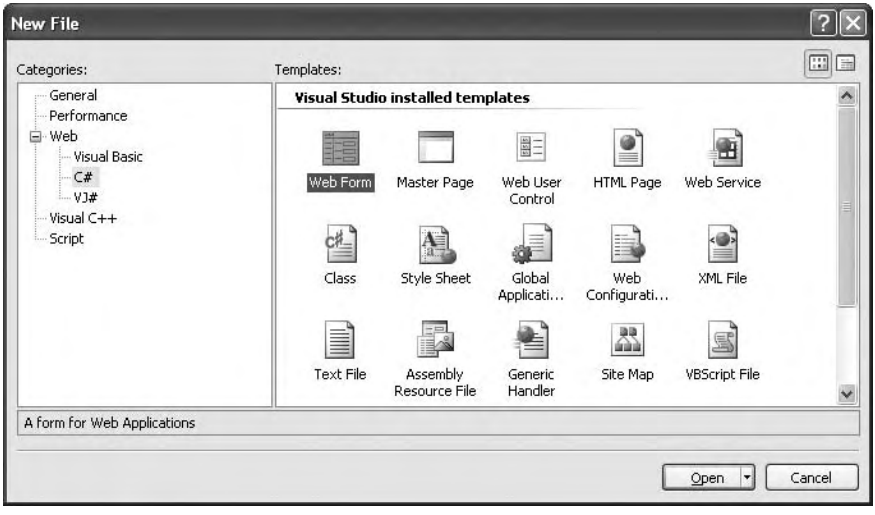


Figure 23-8. *Creating a new* `*.aspx` *file*

Once the page loads into the IDE, notice that the bottom area of the page designer allows you to view the `*.aspx` file in two distinct manners. If you select the Design button, you are shown a visual designer surface that allows you to build the UI of your page much like you would build a Windows Form (drag widgets to the surface, configure them via the Properties Window, etc.). If you select the Source button, you can view the HTML and `<script>` blocks that compose the `*.aspx` file itself.

■ **Note** Unlike earlier versions of Visual Studio, the Source view of Visual Studio 2005 has full-blown IntelliSense and allows you to drag and drop UI elements directly onto the HTML.

Using the Visual Studio 2005 Toolbox, select the Standard tab and drag and drop a `Button`, `Label`, and `GridView` control onto the page designer (the `GridView` widget can be found under the Data tab of the Toolbox). Feel free to make use of the Properties window (or the HTML IntelliSense) to set various UI properties and give each web widget a proper name via the ID property. Figure 23-9 shows one possible design (I kept my look and feel intentionally bland to minimize the amount of generated control markup).

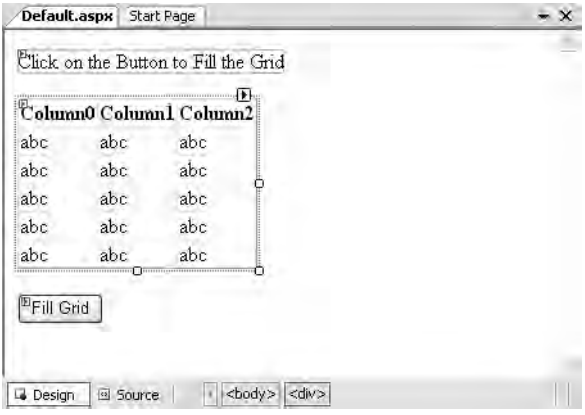


Figure 23-9. *The* `Default.aspx` *UI*

Now, click the Source button at the bottom of your code window and locate the `<form>` section of your page. Notice how each web control has been defined using an `<asp:>` tag. Before the closing tag, you will find a series of name/value pairs that correspond to the settings you made in the Properties window:

```
<form id="form1" runat="server">
<div>
    <asp:Label ID="lblInfo" runat="server"
        Text="Click on the Button to Fill the Grid">
    </asp:Label>
    <asp:GridView ID="carsGridView" runat="server">
    </asp:GridView>
    <asp:Button ID="btnFillData" runat="server" Text="Fill Grid" />
</div>
</form>
```

You will dig into the full details of ASP.NET web controls later in this chapter. Until then, understand that web controls are classes processed on the web server, and they emit back their HTML representation into the outgoing HTTP response automatically (that's right—you don't author the HTML!).

Beyond this major benefit, ASP.NET web controls support a Windows Forms–like programming model, given that the names of the properties, methods, and events mimic their Windows Forms equivalents. To illustrate, handle the `Click` event for the `Button` type using either the Visual Studio Properties window (via the lightning-bolt icon) or using the drop-down boxes mounted at the top of the Source view window. Once you do, you will find your `Button`'s definition has been updated with an `OnClick` attribute that is assigned to the name of your `Click` event handler:

```
<asp:Button ID="btnFillData" runat="server"
Text="Fill Grid" OnClick="btnFillData_Click" />
```

As well, your `<script>` block has been updated with a server-side `Click` event handler (notice that the incoming parameters are a dead-on match for the target of the `System.EventHandler` delegate):

```
<script runat="server">
protected void btnFillData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
}
</script>
```

Implement your server-side event handler to make use of an ADO.NET data reader to fill the `GridView`. Also add an import directive (more details on this in just a moment) that specifies you are using the `System.Data.SqlClient` namespace. Here is the remaining relevant page logic of the `Default.aspx` file:

```
<%@ Page Language="C#" %>
<%@ Import Namespace = "System.Data.SqlClient" %>
...
<script runat="server">
protected void btnFillData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
  SqlConnection sqlConn =
    new SqlConnection("Data Source=.;Initial Catalog=Cars;UID=sa;PWD=");
  sqlConn.Open();
  SqlCommand cmd =
    new SqlCommand("Select * From Inventory", sqlConn);
  carsGridView.DataSource = cmd.ExecuteReader();
  carsGridView.DataBind();
  sqlConn.Close();
}
</script>
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" >
...
</html>
```

Before we dive into the details behind the format of this `*.aspx` file, let's try a test run. Open a Visual Studio 2005 command prompt and run the `WebDev.WebServer.exe` utility, making sure you specify the path where you saved your `Default.aspx` file:

```
webdev.webserver.exe /port:12345 /path:"C:\CodeTests\SinglePageModel"
```

Now, using your browser of choice, enter the following URL:

```
http://localhost:12345/
```

When the page is served, you will initially see your `Label` and `Button` types. However, when you click the `Button`, a postback occurs to the web server, at which point the web controls render back their corresponding HTML tags. Figure 23-10 shows the page hosted within Mozilla Firefox.

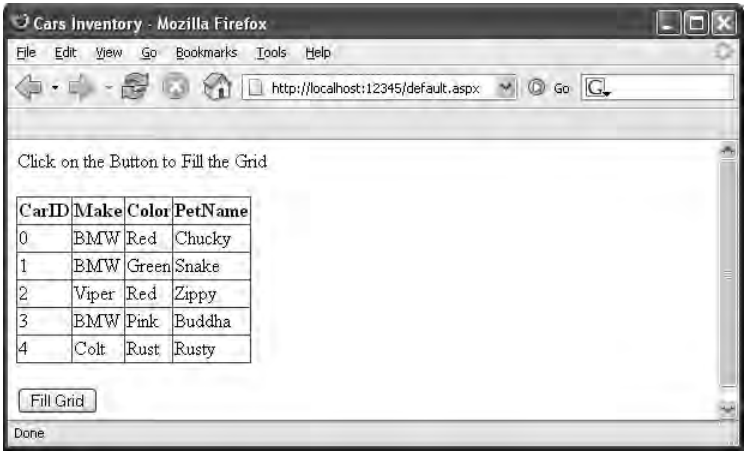


Figure 23-10. *Web-based data access*

That was simple, yes? Of course, as they say, the devil is in the details, so let's dig a bit deeper into the composition of this *.aspx file.

The <%@Page%> Directive

The first thing to be aware of is that a given *.aspx file will typically open with a set of directives. ASP.NET directives are always denoted with <%@ XXX %> markers and may be qualified with various attributes to inform the ASP.NET runtime how to process the attribute in question.

Every *.aspx file must have at minimum a <%@Page%> directive that is used to define the managed language used within the page (via the language attribute). Also, the <%@Page%> directive may define the name of the related code-behind file (if any), enable tracing support, and so forth. Table 23-2 documents some of the more interesting <%@Page%>-centric attributes.

Table 23-2. *Select Attributes of the* <%@Page%> *Directive*

Attribute	Meaning in Life
CompilerOptions	Allows you to define any command-line flags (represented as a single string) passed into the compiler when this page is processed.
CodePage	Specifies the name of the related code-behind file.
EnableTheming	Establishes if the controls on the *.aspx page support ASP.NET 2.0 themes
EnableViewState	Indicates whether view state is maintained across page requests (more details on this in Chapter 24)
Inherits	Defines a class in the code-behind page the *.aspx file derives from, which can be any class derived from System.Web.UI.Page
MasterPageFile	Sets the master page used in conjunction with the current *.aspx page
Trace	Indicates whether tracing is enabled

The <%Import%> Directive

In addition to the <%@Page%> directive, a given *.aspx file may specify various <%@Import%> directives to explicitly state the namespaces required by the current page. Here, you specified you were making use of the types within the System.Data.SqlClient namespace. As you would guess, if you need to make use of additional .NET namespaces, you simply specify multiple <%@Import%> directives.

■ **Note** The <%@Import%> directive is not necessary if you are making use of the code-behind page model. When you do make use of code-behind, you will specify external namespaces using the C# using keyword.

Given your current knowledge of .NET, you may wonder how this *.aspx file avoided specifying the System.Data or System namespaces. The reason is that all *.aspx pages automatically have access to a set of key namespaces, including the following:

- System
- System.Collections
- System.Collections.Generic
- System.Configuration
- System.IO

- System.Text
- System.Text.RegularExpressions
- All of the System.Web-centric namespaces

ASP.NET does define a number of other directives that may appear in an *.aspx file above and beyond <%@Page%> and <%@Import%>; however, I'll reserve commenting on those for the time being.

The "Script" Block

Under the single-file page model, an *.aspx file may contain server-side scripting logic that executes on the web server. Given this it is *critical* that all of your server-side code blocks are defined to execute at the server, using the runat="server" attribute. If the runat="server" attribute is not supplied, the runtime assumes you have authored a block of *client-side* script to be emitted into the outgoing HTTP response:

```
<script runat="server">
protected void btnFillData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
}
</script>
```

The signature of this helper method should look strangely familiar. Recall from our examination of Windows Forms that a given event handler must match the pattern defined by a related .NET delegate. And, just like Windows Forms, when you wish to handle a server-side button click, the delegate in question is System.EventHandler which, as you recall, can only call methods that take a System.Object as the first parameter and a System.EventArgs as the second.

The ASP.NET Widget Declarations

The final point of interest is the declaration of the Button, Label, and GridView Web Form controls. Like classic ASP and raw HTML, ASP.NET web widgets are scoped within <form> elements. This time, however, the opening <form> element is marked with the runat="server" attribute. This again is critical, as this tag informs the ASP.NET runtime that before the HTML is emitted into the response stream, the contained ASP.NET widgets have a chance to render their HTML appearance:

```
<form id="form1" runat="server">
...
</form>
```

ASP.NET web controls are declared with <asp> and </asp> tags, and they are also marked with the runat="server" attribute. Within the opening tag, you will specify the name of the Web Form control and any number of name/value pairs that will be used at runtime to render the correct HTML.

■ **Source Code** The SinglePageModel example is included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

Working with the Code-behind Page Model

To illustrate the code-behind page model, let's re-create the previous example using the Visual Studio 2005 Web Site template (do know that Visual Studio 2005 is not required to build pages using code-behind). Activate the File ➤ New ➤ Web Site menu option, and select the ASP.NET Web Site template (see Figure 23-11).

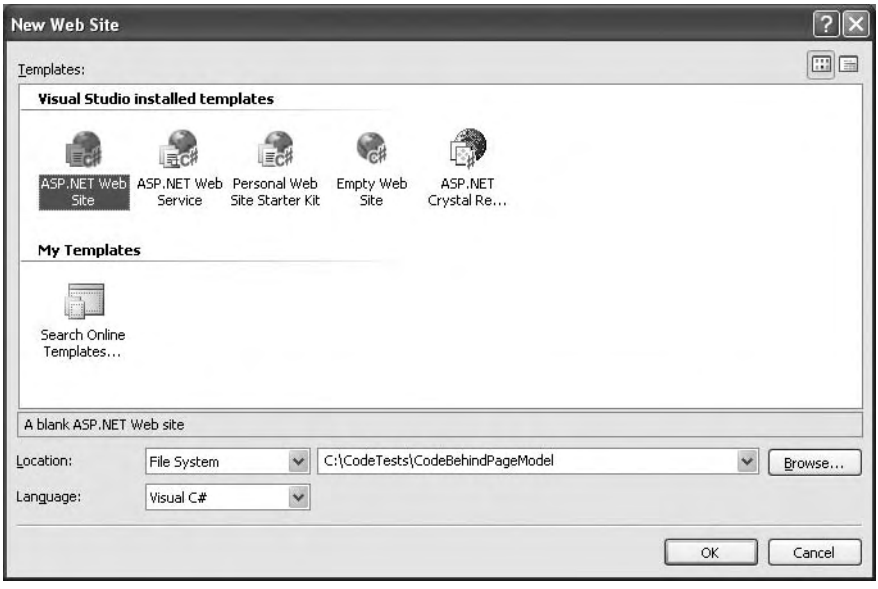


Figure 23-11. *The Visual Studio 2005 ASP.NET Web Site template*

Notice in Figure 23-11 that you are able to select the location of your new site. If you select File System, your content files will be placed within a local directory and pages will be served via `WebDev.WebServer.exe`. If you select FTP or HTTP, your site will be hosted within a virtual directory maintained by IIS. For this example, it makes no difference which option you select, but for simplicity I'd suggest the File System option.

■ **Note** When you create an ASP.NET website, Visual Studio 2005 will place the solution file (`*.sln`) under the My Documents\Visual Studio 2005\Projects directory. Your site's content files (such as the `*.aspx` files) will be located under the specified local directory or (if using IIS) within the physical file mapped to the virtual directory.

Once again, make use of the designer to build a UI consisting of a `Label`, `Button`, and `GridView`, and make use of the Properties window to build a UI of your liking. Now, click the Source button at the bottom of your code window, and you will see the expected `<asp>` and `</asp>` tags. Also note that the `<%@Page%>` directive has been updated with two new attributes:

```
<%@ Page Language="C#" AutoEventWireup="true"
CodeFile="Default.aspx.cs" Inherits="_Default" %>
```

The `CodeFile` attribute is used to specify the related external file that contains this page's coding logic. By default, these code-behind files are named by suffixing `.cs` to the name of the `*.aspx` file (`Default.aspx.cs` in this example). If you examine Solution Explorer, you will see this code-behind file is visible via a subnode on the Web Form icon (see Figure 23-12).

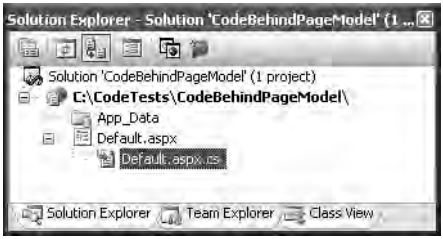


Figure 23-12. *The associated code-behind file for a given* `*.aspx` *file*

■ **Note** The ASP.NET 1.*x* `Codebehind` attribute is no longer supported within the `<%@Page%>` directive.

Beyond a number of `using` statements to specify several web-centric namespaces, your code-behind file defines a partial class deriving from `System.Web.UI.Page`. Notice that the name of this class (`_Default`) is identical to the `Inherits` attribute within the `<%@Page%>` directive (more details on `Page_Load()` a bit later in this chapter):

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
    protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
}
```

Handle the `Click` event for the `Button` type (again, just like you would for a Windows Forms application). As before, the `Button` definition has been updated with an `OnClick` attribute. However, the server-side event handler is no longer placed within a `<script>` scope of the `*.aspx` file, but as a method of the `_Default` class type. To complete this example, add a `using` statement for `System.Data.SqlClient` inside your code-behind file and implement the handler using the previous ADO.NET logic:

```
protected void btnFillGrid_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    SqlConnection sqlConn =
      new SqlConnection("Data Source=.;Initial Catalog=Cars;UID=sa;PWD=");
    sqlConn.Open();
    SqlCommand cmd =
      new SqlCommand("Select * From Inventory", sqlConn);
    carsGridView.DataSource = cmd.ExecuteReader();
    carsGridView.DataBind();
    sqlConn.Close();
}
```

If you selected the File System option, `WebDev.WebServer.exe` starts up automatically when you run your web application (if you selected IIS, this obviously does not occur). In either case, the default browser should now display the page's content.

Debugging and Tracing ASP.NET Pages

By and large, when you are building ASP.NET web projects, you can use the same debugging techniques as you would with any other sort of Visual Studio 2005 project type. Thus, you can set

breakpoints in your code-behind file (as well as embedded "script" blocks in an *.aspx file), start a debug session (the F5 key by default), and step through your code.

However, to debug your ASP.NET web applications, your site must contain a property-constructed Web.config file. Chapter 24 will examine various details behind Web.config files, but in a nutshell these XML files provide the same general purpose as an executable assembly's app.config file. Visual Studio 2005 will detect if your project does not currently have a Web.config file and insert such a file into your project. The relevant element is <compilation>:

```
<configuration xmlns="http://schemas.microsoft.com/.NetConfiguration/v2.0">
...
  <system.web>
    <compilation debug="true"/>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

You are also able to enable tracing support for an *.aspx file by setting the Trace attribute to true within the <%@Page%> directive:

```
<%@ Page Language="C#" AutoEventWireup="true"
CodeFile="Default.aspx.cs" Inherits="_Default" Trace="true" %>
```

Once you do, the emitted HTML now contains numerous details regarding the previous HTTP request/response (server variables, session and application variables, request/response, etc.). To insert your own trace messages into the mix, you can use the Trace property of the System.Web.UI.Page type. Any time you wish to log a custom message (from a script block or C# source code file), simply call the Write() method:

```
protected void btnFillGrid_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Emit a custom trace message.
    Trace.Write("My Category", "Filling the grid!");
...
}
```

If you run your project once again and post back to the web server, you will find your custom category and custom message are present and accounted for. In Figure 23-13, take note of the final message before the "Control Tree" section.

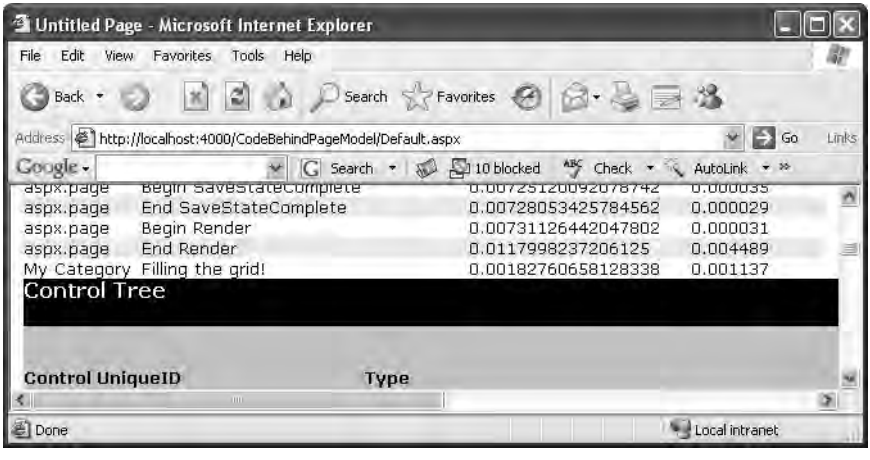


Figure 23-13. *Logging custom trace messages*

■ **Source Code** The CodeBehindPageModel example is included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

Details of an ASP.NET Website Directory Structure

If you have created web applications using ASP.NET 1.*x*, you may be quite surprised to see that many familiar files (`Web.config`, `Global.asax`, `AssemblyInfo.cs`, and so on) are not included when creating a new website. As well, the Web Site template contains a folder named App_Data and does not appear to have References folder within Solution Explorer.

First of all, do know that `Web.config` and `Global.asax` files are most certainly supported under ASP.NET 2.0, but you will need to explicitly add them to your project using the WebSite ➤ Add New Item menu option. Chapter 24 will examine the role of both of these file types, so don't sweat the details for now. Next, be aware that your websites are still able to add references to any number of external .NET assemblies via the WebSite ➤ Add Reference menu option (the end result is a bit different, however, as you will soon see).

Another significant difference is that under Visual Studio 2005, websites may contain any number of specifically named subdirectories, each of which has a special meaning to the ASP.NET runtime. Table 23-3 documents these "special subdirectories."

Table 23-3. *Special ASP.NET 2.0 Subdirectories*

Subfolder	Meaning in Life
App_Browsers	Folder for browser definition files that are used to identify individual browsers and determine their capabilities.
App_Code	Folder for source code for components or classes that you want to compile as part of your application. ASP.NET compiles the code in this folder when pages are requested. Code in the App_Code folder is automatically accessible by your application.
App_Data	Folder for storing Access `*.mdb` files, SQL Express `*.mdf` files, XML files, or other data stores.
App_GlobalResources	Folder for `*.resx` files that are accessed programmatically from application code.
App_LocalResources	Folder for `*.resx` files that are bound to a specific page.
App_Themes	Folder that contains a collection of files that define the appearance of ASP.NET web pages and controls.
App_WebReferences	Folder for proxy classes, schemas, and other files associated with using a web service in your application.
Bin	Folder for compiled private assemblies (`*.dll` files). Assemblies in the Bin folder are automatically referenced by your application.

If you are interested in adding any of these known subfolders to your current web application, you may do so explicitly using the WebSite ➤ Add Folder menu option. However, in many cases, the IDE will automatically do so as you "naturally" insert related files into your site (e.g., adding a new C# file will automatically add an App_Code folder to your directory structure if one does not currently exist).

The Role of the Bin folder

As described in a few pages, ASP.NET web pages are eventually compiled into a .NET assembly. Given this, it should come as no surprise that your websites can reference any number of private or shared assemblies. Under ASP.NET 2.0, the manner in which your site's externally required assemblies are recorded is quite different from ASP.NET 1.*x*. The reason for this fundamental shift is that Visual Studio 2005 now treats websites in a *projectless manner*.

Although the Web Site template does generate a `*.sln` file to load your `*.aspx` files into the IDE, there is no longer a related `*.csproj` file. As you may know, ASP.NET 1.*x* Web Application projects recorded all external assemblies within `*.csproj`. This fact brings up the obvious question, where are the external assemblies recorded under ASP.NET 2.0?

When you reference a private assembly, Visual Studio 2005 will automatically create a Bin directory within your directory structure to store a local copy of the binary. When your code base makes use of types within these code libraries, they are automatically loaded on demand. By way of a simple test, if you activate the WebSite ➤ Add Reference menu option and select any of the previous (non–strongly named) `*.dll`s you created over the course of this text, you will find a Bin folder is displayed within Solution Explorer (see Figure 23-14).

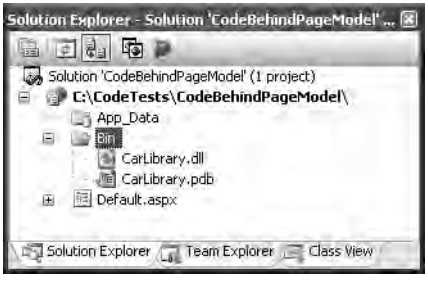


Figure 23-14. *The Bin folder contains copies of all referenced private assemblies.*

If you reference a shared assembly, Visual Studio 2005 automatically inserts a `Web.config` file into your current web solution (if one is not currently in place) and records the external reference within the `<assemblies>` element. For example, if you again activate the WebSite ➤ Add Reference menu option and this time select a shared assembly (such as `System.Drawing.dll`), you will find that your `Web.config` file has been updated as so:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<configuration xmlns="http://schemas.microsoft.com/.NetConfiguration/v2.0">
  <appSettings/>
  <connectionStrings/>
  <system.web>
    <compilation debug="false">
      <assemblies>
        <add assembly="System.Drawing, Version=2.0.0.0,
        Culture=neutral, PublicKeyToken=B03F5F7F11D50A3A"/>
      </assemblies>
    </compilation>
    <authentication mode="Windows"/>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

As you can see, each assembly is described using the same information required for a dynamic load via the `Assembly.Load()` method (see Chapter 12).

The Role of the App_Code Folder

The App_Code folder is used to place source code files that are not directly tied to a specific web page (such as a code-behind file) but are to be compiled for use by your website. Code within the App_Code folder will be automatically compiled on the fly on an as-needed basis. After this point, the assembly is accessible to any other code in the website. To this end, the App_Code folder is much like the Bin folder, except that you can store source code in it instead of compiled code. The major benefit of this approach is that it is possible to define custom types for your web application without having to compile them independently.

A single App_Code folder can contain code files from multiple languages. At runtime, the appropriate compiler kicks in to generate the assembly in question. If you would rather partition your code, however, you can define multiple subdirectories that are used to hold any number of managed code files (`*.cs`, `*.vb`, etc.).

For example, assume you have added an App_Code folder to the root directory of a website application that contains two subfolders (MyCSharpCode and MyVbNetCode) that contain language-specific files. Once you do, you are able to author a `Web.config` file that specifies these subdirectories using a `<codeSubDirectories>` element:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<configuration xmlns="http://schemas.microsoft.com/.NetConfiguration/v2.0">
  <appSettings/>
  <connectionStrings/>
  <system.web>
    <compilation debug="false">
      <assemblies>
        <add assembly="System.Drawing, Version=2.0.0.0,
        Culture=neutral, PublicKeyToken=B03F5F7F11D50A3A"/>
      </assemblies>
      <codeSubDirectories>
        <add directoryName="MyCSharpCode" />
        <add directoryName="MyVbNetCode" />
      </codeSubDirectories>
    </compilation>
    <authentication mode="Windows"/>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

■ **Note** The App_Code directory will also be used to contain files that are not language files, but are useful nonetheless (`*.xsd` files, `*.wsdl` files, etc.).

The ASP.NET 2.0 Page Compilation Cycle

Regardless of which page model you make use of (single-file or code-behind), your `*.aspx` files (and any related code-behind file) are compiled on the fly into a valid .NET assembly. This assembly is then hosted by the ASP.NET worker process (`aspnet_wp.exe`) within its own application domain boundary (see Chapter 13 for details on AppDomains). The manner in which your website's assembly is compiled under ASP.NET 2.0, however, is quite different.

Compilation Cycle for Single-File Pages

If you are making use of the single-file page model, the HTML markup, `<script>` blocks, and web control definitions are dynamically compiled into a class type deriving from `System.Web.UI.Page`.

This name of this class is based on the name of the `*.aspx` file and takes an `_aspx` suffix (e.g., a page named `MyPage.aspx` becomes a class type named `MyPage_aspx`). Figure 23-15 illustrates the basic process.

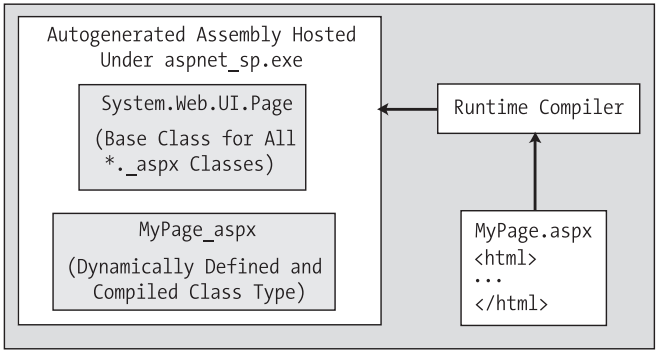


Figure 23-15. *The compilation model for single-file pages*

This dynamically compiled assembly is deployed to a runtime-defined subdirectory under the <%windir%>Microsoft.NET\Framework\v2.0.50215\Temporary ASP.NET Files\root directory. The path beneath \root will differ based on a number of factors (hash codes, etc.), but eventually you will find the `*.dll` (and supporting files) in question. Figure 23-16 shows one such assembly.

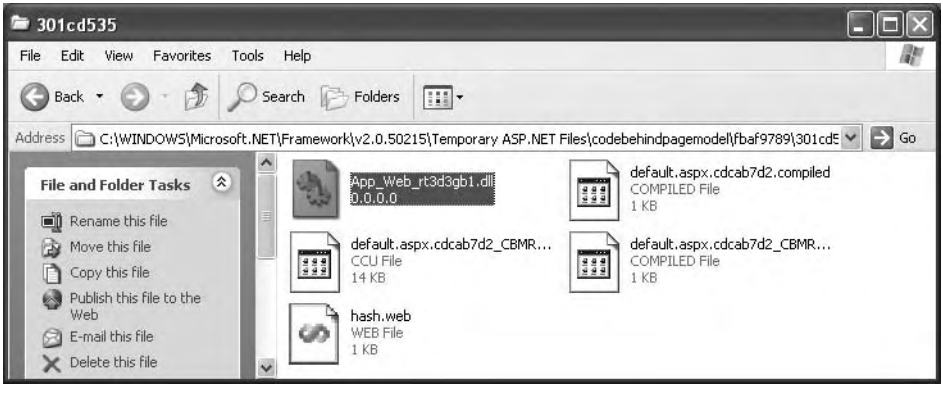


Figure 23-16. *The ASP.NET autogenerated assembly*

Compilation Cycle for Multifile Pages

The compilation process of a page making use of the code-behind model is similar to that of the single-file model. However, the type deriving from `System.Web.UI.Page` is composed from three (yes, *three*) files rather than the expected *two*.

Looking back at the previous CodeBehindPageModel example, recall that the `Default.aspx` file was connected to a partial class named `_Default` within the code-behind file. If you have a background in ASP.NET 1.*x*, you may wonder what happened to the member variable declarations for the various

web controls as well as the code within `InitializeComponent()`, such as event handling logic. Under ASP.NET 2.0, these details are accounted for by a third "file" generated in memory. In reality, of course, this is not a literal file, but an in-memory representation of the partial class. Consider Figure 23-17.

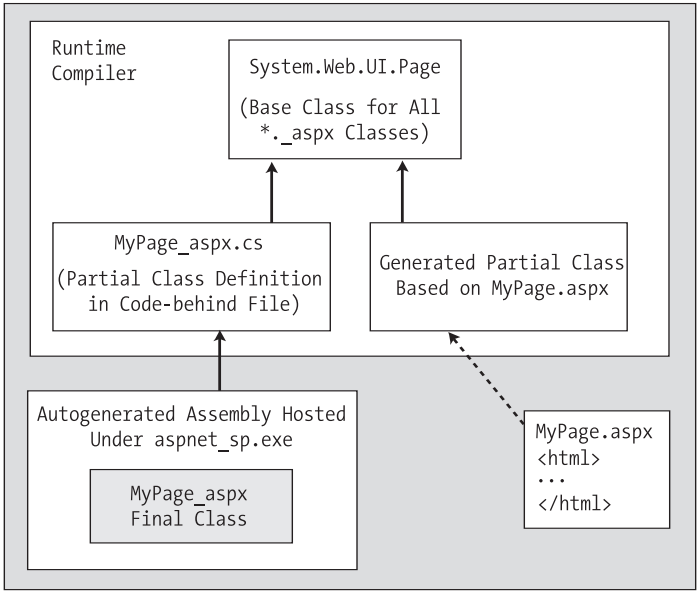


Figure 23-17. *The compilation model for multifile pages*

In this model, the web controls declared in the `*.aspx` file are used to build the additional partial class that defines each UI member variable and the configuration logic that used to be found within the `InitializeComponent()` method of ASP.NET 1.*x* (we just never directly see it). This partial class is combined at compile time with the code-behind file to result in the *base class* of the generated `_aspx` class type (in the single-file page compilation model, the generated `_aspx` file derived directly from `System.Web.UI.Page`).

In either case, once the assembly has been created upon the initial HTTP request, it will be reused for all subsequent requests, and thus will not have to be recompiled. Understanding this factoid should help explain why the first request of an `*.aspx` page takes the longest, and subsequent hits to the same page are extremely efficient.

■ **Note** Under ASP.NET 2.0, it is now possible to precompile all pages (or a subset of pages) of a website using a command-line tool named `aspnet_compiler.exe`. Check out the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for details.

The Inheritance Chain of the Page Type

As you have just seen, the final generated class that represents your `*.aspx` file eventually derives from `System.Web.UI.Page`. Like any base class, this type provides a polymorphic interface to all derived types. However, the `Page` type is not the only member in your inheritance hierarchy. If you

were to locate the Page type (within the System.Web.dll assembly) using the Visual Studio 2005 object browser, you would find that Page "is-a" TemplateControl, which "is-a" Control, which "is-a" Object (see Figure 23-18).

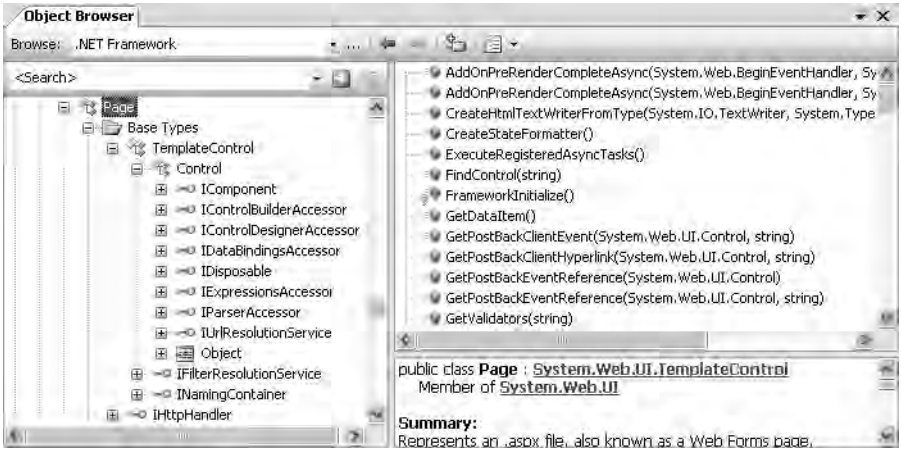


Figure 23-18. *The derivation of an ASP.NET page*

As you would guess, each of these base classes brings a good deal of functionality to each and every *.aspx file. For the majority of your projects, you will make use of the members defined within the Page and Control parent classes. By and large, the functionality gained from the System.Web.UI.TemplateControl class is only of interest to you if you are building custom Web Form controls or interacting with the rendering process. This being said, let's get to know the role of the Page type.

The System.Web.UI.Page Type

The first parent class of interest is Page itself. Here you will find numerous properties that enable you to interact with various web primitives such as application and session variables, the HTTP request/response, theme support, and so forth. Table 23-4 describes some (but by no means all) of the core properties.

Table 23-4. *Properties of the* Page *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
Application	Allows you to interact with application variables for the current website
Cache	Allows you to interact with the cache object for the current website
ClientTarget	Allows you to specify how this page should render itself based on the requesting browser
IsPostBack	Gets a value indicating if the page is being loaded in response to a client postback or if it is being loaded and accessed for the first time
MasterPageFile	Establishes the master page for the current page
Request	Provides access to the current HTTP request
Response	Allows you to interact with the outgoing HTTP response

Property	Meaning in Life
Server	Provides access to the HttpServerUtility object, which contains various server-side helper functions
Session	Allows you to interact with the session data for the current caller
Theme	Gets or sets the name of the theme used for the current page
Trace	Provides access to a TraceContext object, which allows you to log custom messages during debugging sessions

Interacting with the Incoming HTTP Request

As you saw earlier in this chapter, the basic flow of a web session begins with a client logging on to a site, filling in user information, and clicking a Submit button to post back the HTML form data to a given web page for processing. In most cases, the opening tag of the form statement specifies an action attribute and a method attribute that indicates the file on the web server that will be sent the data in the various HTML widgets, as well as the method of sending this data (GET or POST):

```
<form name="defaultPage" id="defaultPage"
  action="http://localhost/Cars/ClassicAspPage.asp" method = "GET">
     ...
</form>
```

Unlike classic ASP, ASP.NET does not support an object named Request. However, all ASP.NET pages do inherit the System.Web.UI.Page.Request *property,* which provides access to an instance of the HttpRequest class type. Table 23-5 lists some core members that, not surprisingly, mimic the same members found within the legacy classic ASP Request object.

Table 23-5. *Members of the* HttpRequest *Type*

Member	Meaning in Life
ApplicationPath	Gets the ASP.NET application's virtual application root path on the server
Browser	Provides information about the capabilities of the client browser
Cookies	Gets a collection of cookies sent by the client browser
FilePath	Indicates the virtual path of the current request
Form	Gets a collection of Form variables
Headers	Gets a collection of HTTP headers
HttpMethod	Indicates the HTTP data transfer method used by the client (GET, POST)
IsSecureConnection	Indicates whether the HTTP connection is secure (i.e., HTTPS)
QueryString	Gets the collection of HTTP query string variables
RawUrl	Gets the current request's raw URL
RequestType	Indicates the HTTP data transfer method used by the client (GET, POST)
ServerVariables	Gets a collection of web server variables
UserHostAddress	Gets the IP host address of the remote client
UserHostName	Gets the DNS name of the remote client

In addition to these properties, the HttpRequest type has a number of useful methods, including the following:

- `MapPath()`: Maps the virtual path in the requested URL to a physical path on the server for the current request.
- `SaveAs()`: Saves details of the current HTTP request to a file on the web server (which can prove helpful for debugging purposes).
- `ValidateInput()`: If the validation feature is enabled via the `Validate` attribute of the page directive, this method can be called to check all user input data (including cookie data) against a predefined list of potentially dangerous input data.

Obtaining Brower Statistics

The first interesting aspect of the `HttpRequest` type is the `Browser` property, which provides access to an underlying `HttpBrowserCapabilities` object. `HttpBrowserCapabilities` in turn exposes numerous members that allow you to programmatically investigate statistics regarding the browser that sent the incoming HTTP request.

Create a new ASP.NET website named `FunWithPageMembers`. Your first task is to build a UI that allows users to click a `Button` web control to view various statistics about the calling browser. These statistics will be generated dynamically and attached to a `Label` type (named `lblOutput`). The `Button` `Click` event handler is as follows:

```
protected void btnGetBrowserStats_Click(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
     string theInfo = "";
     theInfo += String.Format("<li>Is the client AOL? {0}",
          Request.Browser.AOL);
     theInfo +=
          String.Format("<li>Does the client support ActiveX? {0}",
          Request.Browser.ActiveXControls);
     theInfo += String.Format("<li>Is the client a Beta? {0}",
          Request.Browser.Beta);
     theInfo +=
          String.Format("<li>Dose the client support Java Applets? {0}",
          Request.Browser.JavaApplets);
     theInfo +=
          String.Format("<li>Does the client support Cookies? {0}",
          Request.Browser.Cookies);
     theInfo +=
          String.Format("<li>Does the client support VBScript? {0}",
          Request.Browser.VBScript);
     lblOutput.Text = theInfo;
}
```

Here you are testing for a number of browser capabilities. As you would guess, it is (very) helpful to discover a browser's support for ActiveX controls, Java applets, and client-side VBScript code. If the calling browser does not support a given web technology, your `*.aspx` page would be able to take an alternative course of action.

Access to Incoming Form Data

Other aspects of the `HttpResponse` type are the `Form` and `QueryString` properties. These two properties allow you to examine the incoming form data using name/value pairs, and they function identically to classic ASP. Recall from our earlier discussion of classic ASP that if the data is submitted using HTTP `GET`, the form data is accessed using the `QueryString` property, whereas data submitted via HTTP `POST` is obtained using the `Form` property.

While you could most certainly make use of the `HttpRequest.Form` and `HttpRequest.QueryString` properties to access client-supplied form data on the web server, these old-school techniques are (for the most part) unnecessary. Given that ASP.NET supplies you with server-side web controls, you are able to treat HTML UI elements as true objects. Therefore, rather than obtaining the value within a text box as follows:

```
protected void btnGetFormData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Get value for a widget with ID txtFirstName.
    string firstName = Request.Form["txtFirstName"];
}
```

you can simply ask the server-side widget directly via the `Text` property:

```
protected void btnGetFormData_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Get value for a widget with ID txtFirstName.
    string firstName = txtFirstName.Text;
}
```

Not only does this approach lend itself to solid OO principles, but also you do not need to concern yourself with how the form data was submitted (`GET` or `POST`) before obtaining the values. Furthermore, working with the widget directly is much more type-safe, given that typing errors are discovered at compile time rather than runtime. Of course, this is not to say that you will *never* need to make use of the `Form` or `QueryString` property in ASP.NET; rather, the need to do so has greatly diminished.

The IsPostBack Property

Another very important member of `HttpRequest` is the `IsPostBack` property. Recall that "postback" refers to the act of returning to a particular web page while still in session with the server. Given this definition, understand that the `IsPostBack` property will return true if the current HTTP request has been sent by a currently logged on user and false if this is the user's first interaction with the page.

Typically, the need to determine whether the current HTTP request is indeed a postback is most helpful when you wish to perform a block of code only the first time the user accesses a given page. For example, you may wish to populate an ADO.NET `DataSet` when the user first accesses an `*.aspx` file and cache the object for later use. When the caller returns to the page, you can avoid the need to hit the database unnecessarily (of course, some pages may require that the `DataSet` is always updated upon each request, but that is another issue):

```
protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Only fill DataSet the very first time
     // the user comes to this page.
     if(!IsPostBack)
     {
          // Populate DataSet and cache it!
     }
     // Use cached DataSet.
}
```

Interacting with the Outgoing HTTP Response

Now that you have a better understanding how the `Page` type allows you to interact with the incoming HTTP request, the next step is to see how to interact with the outgoing HTTP response. In ASP.NET, the `Response` property of the `Page` class provides access to an instance of the `HttpResponse` type. This

type defines a number of properties that allow you to format the HTTP response sent back to the client browser. Table 23-6 lists some core properties.

Table 23-6. *Properties of the* `HttpResponse` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Cache`	Returns the caching semantics of the web page (e.g., expiration time, privacy, vary clauses)
`ContentEncoding`	Gets or sets the HTTP character set of the output stream
`ContentType`	Gets or sets the HTTP MIME type of the output stream
`Cookies`	Gets the `HttpCookie` collection sent by the current request
`IsClientConnected`	Gets a value indicating whether the client is still connected to the server
`Output`	Enables custom output to the outgoing HTTP content body
`OutputStream`	Enables binary output to the outgoing HTTP content body
`StatusCode`	Gets or sets the HTTP status code of output returned to the client
`StatusDescription`	Gets or sets the HTTP status string of output returned to the client
`SuppressContent`	Gets or sets a value indicating that HTTP content will not be sent to the client

Also, consider the partial list of methods supported by the `HttpResponse` type described in Table 23-7.

Table 23-7. *Methods of the* `HttpResponse` *Type*

Method	Meaning in Life
`AddCacheDependency()`	Adds an object to the application catch (see Chapter 24)
`Clear()`	Clears all headers and content output from the buffer stream
`End()`	Sends all currently buffered output to the client, and then closes the socket connection
`Flush()`	Sends all currently buffered output to the client
`Redirect()`	Redirects a client to a new URL
`Write()`	Writes values to an HTTP output content stream
`WriteFile()`	Writes a file directly to an HTTP content output stream

Emitting HTML Content

Perhaps the most well-known aspect of the `HttpResponse` type is the ability to write content directly to the HTTP output stream. The `HttpResponse.Write()` method allows you to pass in any HTML tags and/or text literals. The `HttpResponse.WriteFile()` method takes this functionality one step further, in that you can specify the name of a physical file on the web server whose contents should be rendered to the output stream (this is quite helpful to quickly emit the contents of an existing `*.htm` file).

To illustrate, assume you have added another `Button` type to your current `*.aspx` file that implements the server-side `Click` event handler as so:

```
protected void btnHttpResponse_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
  Response.Write("<b>My name is:</b><br>");
  Response.Write(this.ToString());
```

```
  Response.Write("<br><br><b>Here was your last request:</b><br>");
  Response.WriteFile("MyHTMLPage.htm");
}
```

The role of this helper function (which you can assume is called by some server-side event handler) is quite simple. The only point of interest is the fact that the `HttpResponse.WriteFile()` method is now emitting the contents of a server-side `*.htm` file within the root directory of the website.

Again, while you can always take this old-school approach and render HTML tags and content using the `Write()` method, this approach is far less common under ASP.NET than with classic ASP. The reason is (once again) due to the advent of server-side web controls. Thus, if you wish to render a block of textual data to the browser, your task is as simple as assigning a string to the `Text` property of a `Label` widget.

Redirecting Users

Another aspect of the `HttpResponse` type is the ability to redirect the user to a new URL:

```
protected void btnSomeTraining_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    Response.Redirect("http://www.IntertechTraining.com");
}
```

If this event handler was invoked via a client-side postback, the user will automatically be redirected to the specified URL.

■ **Note** The `HttpResponse.Redirect()` method will always entail a trip back to the client browser. If you simply wish to transfer control to a `*.aspx` file in the same virtual directory, the `HttpServerUtility.Transfer()` method (accessed via the inherited `Server` property) will be more efficient.

So much for investigating the functionality of `System.Web.UI.Page`. We will examine the role of the `System.Web.UI.Control` base class in just a bit; however, the next task is to examine the life and times of a `Page`-derived object.

■ **Source Code** The FunWithPageMembers files are included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

The Life Cycle of an ASP.NET Web Page

Every ASP.NET web page has a fixed life cycle. When the ASP.NET runtime receives an incoming request for a given `*.aspx` file, the associated `System.Web.UI.Page`-derived type is allocated into memory using the type's default constructor. After this point, the framework will automatically fire a series of events.

By default, a Visual Studio 2005–generated code-behind page defines an event handler for the page's `Load` event:

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
    protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
}
```

Beyond the `Load` event, a given `Page` is able to intercept any of the core events in Table 23-8, which are listed in the order in which they are encountered.

Table 23-8. *Events of the* `Page` *Type*

Event	Meaning in Life
`PreInit`	The framework uses this event to allocate any web controls, apply themes, establish the master page, and set user profiles. You may intercept this event to customize the process.
`Init`	The framework uses this event to set the properties of web controls to their previous values via postback or view state data (more details on this in Chapter 24).
`Load`	When this event fires, the page and its controls are fully initialized, and their previous values are restored. At this point, it is safe to interact with each web widget.
"Event that triggered the postback"	There is of course, no event of this name. This "event" simply refers to whichever event caused the browser to perform the postback to the web server (such as a `Button` click).
`PreRender`	All control data binding and UI configuration has occurred and the controls are ready to render their data into the outbound HTTP response.
`Unload`	The page and its controls have finished the rendering process, and the page object is about to be destroyed. At this point, it is a runtime error to interact with the outgoing HTTP response. You may, however, capture this event to perform any page-level cleanup (close file or database connections, perform any form of logging activity, dispose of objects, etc.).

■ **Note** Each event of the `Page` type works in conjunction with the `System.EventHandler` delegate.

The Role of the AutoEventWireUp Attribute

When you wish to handle events for your page, you will need to update your `<script>` block or code-behind file with an appropriate event handler. Unlike in ASP.NET 1.*x*, you are not required to rig up the event logic by hand. All you need to do is define a method using the following pattern:

```
protected Page_nameOfTheEvent(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
}
```

For example, the `Unload` event can be handle this event simply by writing the following:

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
    protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
    protected void Page_Unload(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
}
```

The reason this method is magically called when the page unloads (despite the fact that you have not applied the expected C# event syntax) is due to the `AutoEventWireUp` attribute set to true by default in the `<%@Page%>` directive of your `*.aspx` file:

```
<%@ Page Language="C#" AutoEventWireup="true"
CodeFile="Default.aspx.cs" Inherits="_Default" %>
```

As its name suggests, this attribute (when enabled) will generate the necessary event riggings within the autogenerated partial class described in earlier in this chapter. If you were to set this attribute to false, neither the `Load` nor `Unload` event handlers of the `_Default` page will be called by the framework (you can verify this for yourself by setting breakpoints within the `Page_Load()` and `Page_Unload()` event handlers).

However, if you were to make use of the standard C# event syntax to hook into the `Load` and `Unload` events as shown here:

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
    public _Default()
    {
        // Explicitly hook into the Load and Unload events.
        this.Load +=new EventHandler(Page_Load);
        this.Unload += new EventHandler(Page_Unload);
    }
    protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        Response.Write("Load event fired!");
    }
    protected void Page_Unload(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // No longer possible to emit data to the HTTP
        // response at this point, so we will write to a local file.
        System.IO.File.WriteAllText(@"C:\MyLog.txt", "Page unloading!");
    }
    protected void btnPostback_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Nothing happens here; this is just to ensure a
        // postback to the page.
    }
}
```

these events will be captured in your page regardless of the value assigned to `AutoEventWireup`.

As a final note, remember that once the `Unload` event fires, you are no longer able to interact with the outbound HTTP response (if you attempt to call members of the `HttpResponse` object, you will receive a runtime exception). Given this, your `Unload` event handler is simply emitting a line of text to a file on the local C drive.

The Error Event

Another event that may occur during your page's life cycle is `Error`, which also works in conjunction with the `System.EventHandler` delegate. This event will be fired if a method on the `Page`-derived type triggered an exception that was not explicitly handled. Assume that you have handled the `Click` event for a given `Button` on your page, and within the event handler (which I named `btnGetFile_Click`), you attempt to write out the contents of a local file to the HTTP response.

Also assume you have *failed* to test for the presence of this file via standard structured exception handling. If you have rigged up the page's `Error` event, you have one final chance to deal with the problem before the end user finds an ugly error. Ponder the following code:

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
    public _Default()
    {
...
```

```
        // Rig up the Error event.
        this.Error += new EventHandler(_Default_Error);
    }
    void _Default_Error(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Gut the current response, issue an error,
        // and tell the runtime the error has been processed.
        Response.Clear();
        Response.Write("I am sorry...I can't find a required file.");
        Server.ClearError();
    }
    protected void btnGetFile_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Try to open a nonexistent file.
        // This will fire the Error event for this page.
        System.IO.File.ReadAllText(@"C:\IDontExist.txt");
    }
...
}
```

Notice that your `Error` event handler begins by clearing out any content currently within the HTTP response and emits a generic error message. If you wish to gain access to the specific `System.Exception` object, you may do so using the `HttpServerUtility.GetLastError()` method exposed by the inherited `Server` property:

```
void _Default_Error(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    Response.Clear();
    Response.Write("I am sorry...I can't find a required file.<br>");
    Response.Write(string.Format("The error was: <b>{0}</b>",
        Server.GetLastError().Message));
    Server.ClearError();
}
```

Finally, note that before exiting this generic error handler, you are explicitly calling the `HttpServerUtility.ClearError()` method via the `Server` property. This is required, as it informs the runtime that you have dealt with the issue at hand and require no further processing. If you forget to do so, you the end user will be presented with the runtime's error page. Figure 23-19 shows the result of this error-trapping logic.

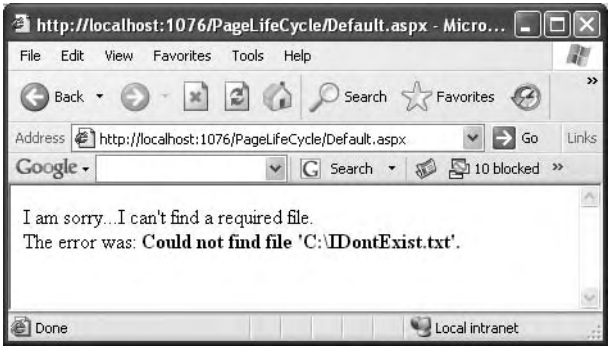


Figure 23-19. *Page-level error handling*

At this point, you should feel quite confident with your knowledge of the architecture of an ASP.NET Page type. Now that you have such a foundation, you can turn your attention to the role of ASP.NET web controls.

■ **Source Code** The PageLifeCycle files are included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

Understanding the Nature of Web Controls

Perhaps the major benefit of ASP.NET is the ability to assemble the UI of your pages using the types defined in the System.Web.UI.WebControls namespace. As you have seen, these controls (which go by the names *server controls*, *web controls*, or *web form controls*) are *extremely* helpful in that they automatically generate the necessary HTML for the requesting browser and expose a set of events that may be processed on the web server. Furthermore, because each ASP.NET control has a corresponding class in the System.Web.UI.WebControls namespace, it can be manipulated in an OO manner from your *.aspx file (within a <script> block) as well as within the associated class defined in the code-behind file.

As you have seen, when you configure the properties a web control using the Visual Studio 2005 Properties window, your edits are recorded in the open declaration of a given widget in the *.aspx file as a series of name/value pairs. Thus, if you add a new TextBox to the designer of a given *.aspx file and change the BorderStyle, BorderWidth, BackColor, Text, and BorderColor properties using the IDE, the opening <asp:TextBox> tag is modified as follows:

```
<asp:TextBox id=myTextBox runat="server" BorderStyle="Ridge" BorderWidth="5px"
BackColor="PaleGreen" BorderColor="DarkOliveGreen" Text = "Yo dude" >
</asp:TextBox>
```

Given that the HTML declaration of a web control eventually becomes a member variable from the System.Web.UI.WebControls namespace (via the dynamic compilation cycle), you are able to interact with the members of this type within a server-side <script> block or the page's code-behind file, for example:

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
...
    protected void btnChangeTextBoxColor_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Modify the HTTP response data for this widget.
        this.myTextBox.BackColor = System.Drawing.Color.Red;
    }
}
```

All ASP.NET web controls ultimately derive from a common base class named System.Web.UI.WebControls.WebControl. WebControl in turn derives from System.Web.UI.Control (which derives from System.Object). Control and WebControl each define a number of properties common to all server-side controls. Before we examine the inherited functionality, let's formalize what it means to handle a server-side event.

Qualifying Server-Side Event Handling

Given the current state of the World Wide Web, it is impossible to avoid the fundamental nature of browser/web server interaction. Whenever these two entities communicate, there is always an underlying, stateless, HTTP request-and-response cycle. While ASP.NET server controls do a great deal to shield you from the details of the raw HTTP protocol, always remember that treating the

Web as an event-driven entity is just a magnificent smoke-and-mirrors show provided by the CLR, and it is not identical to the event-driven model of a Windows-based UI.

Thus, although the `System.Windows.Forms` and `System.Web.UI.WebControls` namespaces define types with the same simple names (`Button`, `TextBox`, `GridView`, `Label`, and so on), they do not expose an identical set of events. For example, there is no way to handle a server-side `MouseMove` event when the user moves the cursor over a Web Form `Button` type. Obviously, this is a good thing. (Who wants to post back to the server each time the mouse moves?)

The bottom line is that a given ASP.NET web control will expose a limited set of events, all of which ultimately result in a postback to the web server. Any necessary client-side event processing will require you to author blurbs of *client-side* JavaScript/VBScript script code to be processed by the requesting browser's scripting engine.

The AutoPostBack Property

It is also worth pointing out that many of the ASP.NET web controls support a property named `AutoPostBack` (most notably, the `CheckBox`, `RadioButton`, and `TextBox` controls, as well as any widget that derives from the abstract `ListControl` type). By default, this property is set to false, which disables the automatic posting of server-side events (even if you have indeed rigged up the event in the code-behind file). In many cases, this is the exact behavior you require.

However, if you wish to cause any of these widgets to post back to a server-side event handler, simply set the value of `AutoPostBack` to true. This technique can be helpful if you wish to have the state of one widget automatically populate another value within another widget on the same page.

To illustrate, create a website that contains a single `TextBox` (named `txtAutoPostback`) and a single `ListBox` control (named `lstTextBoxData`). Now, handle the `TextChanged` event of the `TextBox`, and within the server-side event handler, populate the `ListBox` with the current value in the `TextBox` (got all that?):

```
protected void txtAutoPostback_TextChanged(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    lstTextBoxData.Items.Add(txtAutoPostback.Text);
}
```

If you run the application as is, you will find that as you type in the `TextBox`, nothing happens. Furthermore, if you type in the `TextBox` and tab to the next control, nothing happens. The reason is that the `AutoPostBack` property of the `TextBox` is set to false by default. However, if you set this property to true as follows:

```
<asp:TextBox ID="txtAutoPostback" runat="server" AutoPostBack="True"
OnTextChanged="txtAutoPostback_TextChanged">
</asp:TextBox>
```

you will find that when you tab off the `TextBox` (or press the Enter key), the `ListBox` is automatically populated with the current value in the `TextBox`. To be sure, beyond the need to populate the items of one widget based on the value of another widget, you will typically not need to alter the state of a widget's `AutoPostBack` property.

The System.Web.UI.Control Type

The `System.Web.UI.Control` base class defines various properties, methods, and events that allow the ability to interact with core (typically non-GUI) aspects of a web control. Table 23-9 documents some, not all, members of interest.

Table 23-9. *Select Members of* `System.Web.UI.Control`

Member	Meaning in Life
`Controls`	This property gets a `ControlCollection` object that represents the child controls within the current control.
`DataBind()`	This method binds a data source to the invoked server control and all its child controls.
`EnableThemeing`	This property establishes if the control supports theme functionality.
`HasControls()`	This method determines if the server control contains any child controls.
`ID`	This property gets or sets the programmatic identifier assigned to the server control.
`Page`	This property gets a reference to the `Page` instance that contains the server control.
`Parent`	This property gets a reference to the server control's parent control in the page control hierarchy.
`SkinID`	This property gets or sets the "skin" to apply to the control. Under ASP.NET 2.0, it is now possible to establish a control's overall look and feel on the fly via skins.
`Visible`	This property gets or sets a value that indicates whether a server control is rendered as UI element on the page.

Enumerating Contained Controls

The first aspect of `System.Web.UI.Control` we will examine is the fact that all web controls (including `Page` itself) inherit a custom controls collection (accessed via the `Controls` property). Much like in a Windows Forms application, the `Controls` property provides access to a strongly typed collection of `WebControl`-derived types. Like any .NET collection, you have the ability to add, insert, and remove items dynamically at runtime.

While it is technically possible to directly add web controls directly to a `Page`-derived type, it is easier (and a wee bit safer) to make use of a `Panel` widget. The `System.Web.UI.WebControls.Panel` class represents a container of widgets that may or may not be visible to the end user (based on the value of its `Visible` and `BorderStype` properties).

To illustrate, create a new website named `DynamicCtrls`. Using the Visual Studio 2005 page designer, add a `Panel` type (named `myPanel`) that contains a `TextBox`, `Button`, and `HyperLink` widget named whatever you choose (be aware that the designer requires that you drag internal items within the UI of the `Panel` type). Once you have done so, the `<form>` element of your `*.aspx` file has been updated as so:

```
<asp:Panel ID="myPanel" runat="server" Height="50px" Width="125px">
  <asp:TextBox ID="TextBox1" runat="server"></asp:TextBox><br />
  <asp:Button ID="Button1" runat="server" Text="Button" /><br />
  <asp:HyperLink ID="HyperLink1" runat="server">HyperLink
  </asp:HyperLink>
</asp:Panel>
```

Next, place a `Label` widget outside the scope of the `Panel` (named `lblControlInfo`) to hold the rendered output. Assume in the `Page_Load()` event you wish to obtain a list of all the controls contained within the `Panel` and assign the results to the `Label` type:

```
public partial class _Default : System.Web.UI.Page
{
    protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        ListControlsInPanel();
    }
    private void ListControlsInPanel()
    {
        string theInfo;
        theInfo = String.Format("Has controls? {0}<br>",
             myPanel.HasControls());
        foreach (Control c in myPanel.Controls)
        {
            if (c.GetType() != typeof(System.Web.UI.LiteralControl))
            {
                theInfo += "**************************<br>";
                theInfo += String.Format("Control Name? {0}<br>",
                    c.ToString());
                theInfo += String.Format("ID? {0}<br>", c.ID);
                theInfo += String.Format("Control Visible? {0}<br>",
                    c.Visible);
                theInfo += String.Format("ViewState? {0}<br>",
                    c.EnableViewState);
            }
        }
        lblControlInfo.Text = theInfo;
    }
}
```

Here, you iterate over each `WebControl` maintained on the `Panel` and perform a check to see if the current type is of type `System.Web.UI.LiteralControl`. This type is used to represent literal HTML tags and content (such as `<br>`, text literals, etc.). If you do not do this sanity check, you might be surprised to find a total of seven types in the scope of the `Panel` (given the `*.aspx` declaration seen previously). Assuming the type is not literal HTML content, you then print out some various statistics about the widget. Figure 23-20 shows the output.



Figure 23-20. *Enumerating contained widgets*

Dynamically Adding (and Removing) Controls

Now, what if you wish to modify the contents of a `Panel` at runtime? The process should look very familiar to you, given your work with Windows Forms earlier in this text. Let's update the current page to support an additional `Button` (named `btnAddWidgets`) that dynamically adds five new `TextBox` types to the `Panel`, and another `Button` that clears the `Panel` widget of all controls. The `Click` event handlers for each are shown here:

```
protected void btnAddWidgets_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    for (int i = 0; i < 5; i++)
    {
        // Assign a name so we can get
        // the text value out later
        // using the HttpRequest.QueryString()
        // method.
        TextBox t = new TextBox();
        t.ID = string.Format("newTextBox{0}", i);
        myPanel.Controls.Add(t);
        ListControlsInPanel();
    }
}
```

```
protected void btnRemovePanelItems_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    myPanel.Controls.Clear();
    ListControlsInPanel();
}
```

Notice that you assign a unique ID to each `TextBox` (e.g., `newTextBox1`, `newTextBox2`, and so on) to obtain its contained text programmatically using the `HttpRequest.Form` collection (shown momentarily).

To obtain the values within these dynamically generated `TextBox`es, update your UI with one additional `Button` and `Label` type. Within the `Click` event handler for the `Button`, loop over each item contained within the `HttpRequest.NameValueCollection` type (accessed via `HttpRequest.Form`) and concatenate the textual information to a locally scoped `System.String`. Once you have exhausted the collection, assign this string to the `Text` property of the new `Label` widget named `lblTextBoxText`:

```
protected void btnGetTextBoxValues_Click(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
     string textBoxValues = "";
     for(int i = 0; i < Request.Form.Count; i++)
     {
          textBoxValues +=
          string.Format("<li>{0}</li><br>", Request.Form[i]);
     }
     lblTextBoxText.Text = textBoxValues;
}
```

When you run the application, you will find that you are able to view the content of each text box, including a rather long (unreadable) string. This string contains the *view state* for each widget on the page and will be examined later in the next chapter. Also, you will notice that once the request has been processed, the ten new text boxes disappear. Again, the reason has to do with the stateless nature of HTTP. If you wish to maintain these dynamically created `TextBox`es between postbacks, you need to persist these objects using ASP.NET state programming techniques (also examined in the next chapter).

■ **Source Code** The DynamicCtrls files are included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

Key Members of the System.Web.UI.WebControls.WebControl Type

As you can tell, the `Control` type provides a number of non-GUI-related behaviors. On the other hand, the `WebControl` base class provides a graphical polymorphic interface to all web widgets, as suggested in Table 23-10.

Table 23-10. *Properties of the* `WebControl` *Base Class*

Properties	Meaning in Life
`BackColor`	Gets or sets the background color of the web control
`BorderColor`	Gets or sets the border color of the web control
`BorderStyle`	Gets or sets the border style of the web control
`BorderWidth`	Gets or sets the border width of the web control

Properties	Meaning in Life
`Enabled`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether the web control is enabled
`CssClass`	Allows you to assign a class defined within a Cascading Style Sheet to a web widget
`Font`	Gets font information for the web control
`ForeColor`	Gets or sets the foreground color (typically the color of the text) of the web control
`Height` `Width`	Get or set the height and width of the web control
`TabIndex`	Gets or sets the tab index of the web control
`ToolTip`	Gets or sets the tool tip for the web control to be displayed when the cursor is over the control

I'd bet that almost all of these properties are self-explanatory, so rather than drill through the use of all these properties, let's shift gears a bit and check out a number of ASP.NET Web Form controls in action.

Categories of ASP.NET Web Controls

The types in `System.Web.UI.WebControls` can be broken down into several broad categories:

- Simple controls
- (Feature) Rich controls
- Data-centric controls
- Input validation controls
- Login controls

The *simple controls* are so named because they are ASP.NET web controls that map to standard HTML widgets (buttons, lists, hyperlinks, image holders, tables, etc.). Next, we have a small set of controls named the *rich controls* for which there is no direct HTML equivalent (such as the `Calendar`, `TreeView`, `Wizard`, etc.). The *data-centric controls* are widgets that are typically populated via a given data connection. The best (and most exotic) example of such a control would be the ASP.NET `GridView`. Other members of this category include "repeater" controls and the lightweight `DataList`. The *validation controls* are server-side widgets that automatically emit client-side JavaScript, for the purpose of form field validation. Finally, as of ASP.NET 2.0, the base class libraries ship with a number of security-centric controls. These UI elements completely encapsulate the details of logging into a site, providing password-retrieval services and managing user roles.

■ **Note** Given that this text does not cover the details of the .NET security system, I will not comment on the new security controls here. If you require a detailed treatment of ASP.NET 2.0 security, check out *Expert ASP.NET 2.0 Advanced Application Design* by Dominic Selly, Andrew Troelsen, and Tom Barnaby (Apress, 2006).

A Brief Word Regarding System.Web.UI.HtmlControls

Truth be told, there are two distinct web control toolkits that ship with ASP.NET 2.0. In addition to the ASP.NET web controls (within the `System.Web.UI.WebControls` namespace), the base class libraries also provide the `System.Web.UI.HtmlControls` widgets.

The HTML controls are a collection of types that allow you to make use of traditional HTML controls on a Web Forms page. However, unlike raw HTML tags, HTML controls are OO entities that can be configured to run on the server and thus support server-side event handling. Unlike ASP.NET web controls, HTML controls are quite simplistic in nature and offer little functionality beyond standard HTML tags (`HtmlButton`, `HtmlInputControl`, `HtmlTable`, etc.).

The HTML controls provide a public interface that mimics standard HTML attributes. For example, to obtain the information within an input area, you make use of the `Value` property, rather than the web control–centric `Text` property. Given that the HTML controls are not as feature-rich as the ASP.NET web controls, I won't make further mention of them in this text. If you wish to investigate these types, consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for further details.

Building a Simple ASP.NET 2.0 Website

Space does not permit me to walk through the details of each and every web control that ships with ASP.NET 2.0 (that would require a sizable book in and of itself). However, to illustrate the process of working with various ASP.NET web controls, the next task of this chapter is to construct a website that will demonstrate the use of the following techniques:

- Working with master pages
- Working with the `Menu` control
- Working with the `GridView` control
- Working with the `Wizard` control

As you work through this example, remember that Web Form controls encapsulate the process of generating corresponding HTML tags and follow a Windows Forms model. To begin, create a new ASP.NET web application named AspNetCarsSite.

Working with Master Pages

As I am sure you are aware, many websites provide a consistent look and feel across multiple pages (a common menu navigation system, common header and footer content, company logo, etc.). Under ASP.NET 1.*x*, developers made extensive use of `UserControl`s and custom web controls to define web content that was to be used across multiple pages. While `UserControl`s and custom web controls are still a very valid option under ASP.NET 2.0, we are now provided with the concept of *master pages* to address the same issue.

Simply put, a master page is little more than an ASP.NET page that takes a `*.master` file extension. On their own, master pages are not viewable from a client-side browser (in fact, the ASP.NET runtime will not server this flavor of web content). Rather, master pages define a common UI frame shared by all pages (or a subset of pages) in your site. As well, a `*.master` page defines various placeholder tags that contain additional content within an `*.aspx` file. The end result is a single, unified UI.

Insert a new master page into your website (via the WebSite ➤ Add New Item menu selection) and observe the initial definition:

```
<%@ Master Language="C#" AutoEventWireup="true"
CodeFile="MasterPage.master.cs" Inherits="MasterPage" %>

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.1//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml11/DTD/xhtml11.dtd">

<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" >
<head runat="server">
```

```
    <title>Untitled Page</title>
</head>
<body>
    <form id="form1" runat="server">
    <div>
        <asp:contentplaceholder id="ContentPlaceHolder1" runat="server">
        </asp:contentplaceholder>
    </div>
    </form>
</body>
</html>
```

The first point of interest is the new <%@Master%> directive. For the most part, this directive supports the same attributes as <%@Page%>. For example, notice how by default a master page makes use of a code-behind file (which is technically optional). Like Page types, a master page derives from a specific base class, which in this case is MasterPage:

```
public partial class MasterPage : System.Web.UI.MasterPage
{
    protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
}
```

It is important to know that the attributes defined within the <%@Master%> directive do not "flow through" to the related *.aspx files. Thus, if you wish to make use of C# within your master page but author an associated *.aspx file in Visual Basic .NET, you may do so.

The other point of interest is the <asp:contentplaceholder> type. This region of a master page represents the UI widgets of the related *.aspx file, not the content of the master page itself. If you do intend to blend an *.aspx file within this region, the scope within the <asp:contentplaceholder> and </asp:contentplaceholder> tags will be empty. However, if you so choose, you are able to populate this area with various web controls that function as a default UI to use in the event that a given *.aspx file in the site does not supply specific content. For this example, assume that each *.aspx page in your site will indeed supply custom content.

■ **Note** A *.master page may define as many content place holders as necessary. As well, a single *.master page may nest additional *.master pages.

As you would hope, you are able to build a common UI of a *.master file using the same Visual Studio 2005 designers used to build *.aspx files. For your site, you will add a descriptive Label (to serve as a common welcome message), an AdRotator control (which will randomly display one of two images), and a Menu control (to allow the user to navigate to other areas of the site).

Working with the Menu Control

ASP.NET 2.0 ships with several new web controls that allow you to handle site navigation: SiteMapPath, TreeView, and Menu. As you would expect, these web widgets can be configured in multiple ways. For example, each of these controls can dynamically generate its nodes via an external XML file or data source. For your Menu type, you will simply hard-code three values.

Using the page designer, select the Menu control, activate the inline editor (located at the upper left of the widget), and select the Edit Menu Items option. Add three root items named Home, Build a Car, and View Inventory. Before dismissing the dialog box, set the NavigateUrl property for each node to the following (yet to be constructed) pages:

- *Home*: `Default.aspx`
- *Build a Car*: `BuildCar.aspx`
- *View Inventory*: `Inventory.aspx`

This is all you need to do to configure your `Menu` widget to navigate to the additional pages on your site. If you wish to perform additional processing when the user selects a given menu item, you may do so by handling the `MenuItemClick` event. There is no need to do so for this example, but be aware that you are able to determine which menu item was selected using the incoming `MenuEventArgs` parameter.

Working with the AdRotator

The role of the ASP.NET `AdRotator` widget is to randomly display a given image at some position in the browser. When you first place an `AdRotator` widget on the designer, it is displayed as an empty placeholder. Functionally, this control cannot do its magic until you assign the `AdvertisementFile` property to point to the source file that describes each image. For this example, the data source will be a simple XML file named `Ads.xml`.

Once you have inserted this new XML file to your site, specify a unique `<Ad>` element for each image you wish to display. At minimum, each `<Ad>` element specifies the image to display (`ImageUrl`), the URL to navigate to if the image is selected (`TargetUrl`), mouseover text (`AlternateText`), and the weight of the ad (`Impressions`):

```
<Advertisements>
    <Ad>
        <ImageUrl>SlugBug.jpg</ImageUrl>
        <TargetUrl>http://www.Cars.com</TargetUrl>
        <AlternateText>Your new Car?</AlternateText>
        <Impressions>80</Impressions>
    </Ad>
    <Ad>
        <ImageUrl>car.gif</ImageUrl>
        <TargetUrl>http://www.CarSuperSite.com</TargetUrl>
        <AlternateText>Like this Car?</AlternateText>
        <Impressions>80</Impressions>
    </Ad>
</Advertisements>
```

At this point, you can associate your XML file to the `AdRotator` controls via the `AdvertisementFile` property (in the Properties window):

```
<asp:AdRotator ID="myAdRotator" runat="server"
AdvertisementFile="~/Ads.xml"/>
```

Later when you run this application and post back to the page, you will be randomly presented with one of two image files. Figure 23-21 illustrates the initial UI of the master page.



Figure 23-21. *The master page*

Defining the Default.aspx Content Page

Now that you have a master page established, you can begin designing the individual `*.aspx` pages that will define the UI content to merge within the `<asp:contentplaceholder>` tag of the master page. When you created this new website, Visual Studio 2005 automatically provided you with an initial `*.aspx` file, but as the file now stands, it cannot be merged within the master page.

The reason is that it is the `*.master` file that defines the `<form>` section of the final HTML page. Therefore, the existing `<form>` area within the `*.aspx` file will need to be replaced with an `<asp:content>` scope. Flip to the Source view of `Default.aspx` and replace the existing markup with the following:

```
<%@ Page Language="C#" MasterPageFile="~/MasterPage.master"
AutoEventWireup="true" CodeFile="Default.aspx.cs"
Inherits="_Default" Title="Untitled Page" %>

<asp:Content ID="Content1"
  ContentPlaceHolderID="ContentPlaceHolder1" Runat="Server">
</asp:Content>
```

First, notice that the `<%@Page%>` directive has been updated with a new `MasterPageFile` attribute that is assigned to your `*.master` file. Also note that the `ContentPlaceHolderID` value is identical to the `<asp:contentplaceholder>` widget in the master file.

Given these associations, you will now find that when you switch back to the Design view, the master's UI is now visible. The content area is visible as well, although it is currently empty. There is no need to build a complex UI for your `Default.aspx` content area, so for this example, simply add a few `Labels` to hold some basic site instructions (see Figure 23-22).

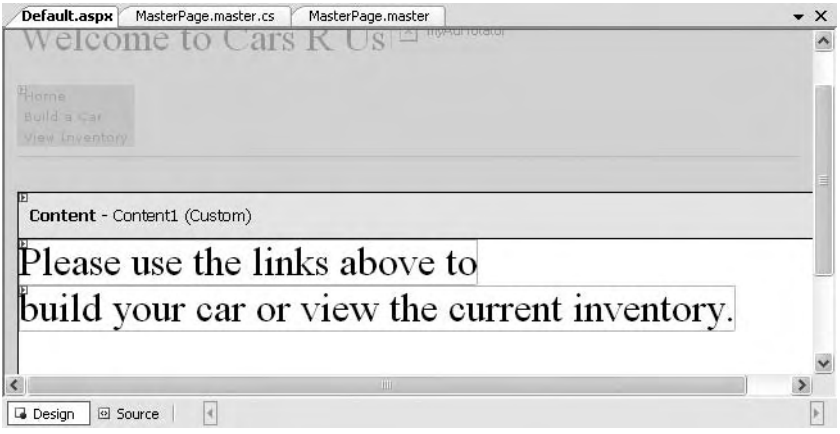


Figure 23-22. *The* `Default.aspx` *content page*

Now, if you run your project, you will find that the UI content of the `*.master` and `Default.aspx` files have been merged into a single stream of HTML. As you can see from Figure 23-23, the end user is unaware that the master page even exists.



Figure 23-23. *The default page of Cars R Us*

Designing the Inventory Content Page

To insert the `Inventory.aspx` content page into your current project, open the `*.master` page in the IDE and select WebSite ➤ Add Content Page (if a `*.master` file is not the active item in the designer, this menu option is not present). The role of the Inventory content page is to display the contents of the Inventory table of the Cars database within a `GridView` control.

As you may know, the `GridView` control is not limited to read-only data display. This widget can be configured to support sorting, paging, and in-place editing. If you wish, you can handle a series of server-side events and author ADO.NET code to do so; this ASP.NET 2.0 widget supersedes the ASP.NET 1.*x* control with a "zero-code" mentality.

With a few simple mouse clicks you can configure the `GridView` to automatically select, update, and delete records of the underlying data store. While this zero-code mind-set greatly simplifies the amount of boilerplate code, understand that this simplicity comes with a loss of control and may not be the best approach for an enterprise-level application.

Nevertheless, to illustrate how to work with the `GridView` in this declarative manner, insert a new content page (`Inventory.aspx`) and update the content area with a descriptive label and a `GridView`. Using the inline editor, select New Data Source from the Choose Data Source drop-down box. This will activate a wizard that walks you through a series of steps to connect this component to the required data source. Here are the steps to take for the current example:

1. Select the Database icon and change the name of the data source ID to CarsDataSource.
2. Select the Cars database (create a new connection if required).
3. If you wish, save the connection string data to a `Web.config` file. Recall from Chapter 22 that ADO.NET now supports the `<connectionStrings>` element.
4. Configure your SQL `Select` statement to select all records from the Inventory table (Figure 23-24 shows the settings I chose).
5. Test your query and click the Finish button.

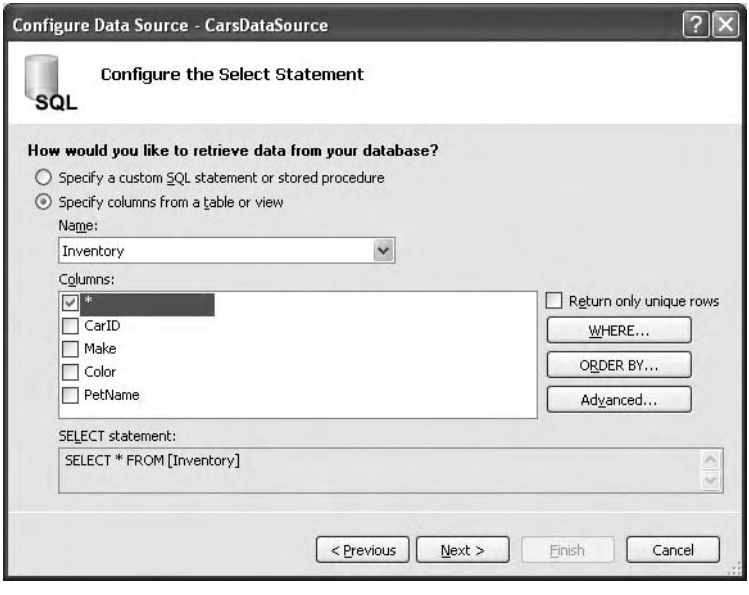


Figure 23-24. *Selecting the Inventory table*

Now, if you examine the opening declaration of the `GridView` control, you will see that the `DataSourceID` property has been set to the `SqlDataSource` you just defined:

```
<asp:GridView ID="GridView1" runat="server" AutoGenerateColumns="False"
  CellPadding="4" DataKeyNames="CarID" DataSourceID="CarsDataSource"
  ForeColor="#333333" GridLines="None">
...
</asp:GridView>
```

The `SqlDataSource` type (new to .NET 2.0) is a component that encapsulates the details of a given data store. Given your work in Chapter 23, the following attributes should be straightforward:

```
<asp:SqlDataSource ID="CarsDataSource" runat="server"
ConnectionString=
    "Data Source=localhost;Initial Catalog=Cars;Integrated Security=True"
ProviderName="System.Data.SqlClient"
SelectCommand="SELECT * FROM [Inventory]">
</asp:SqlDataSource>
```

At this point, you are able to run your web program, click the View Inventory menu item, and view your data (see Figure 23-25).

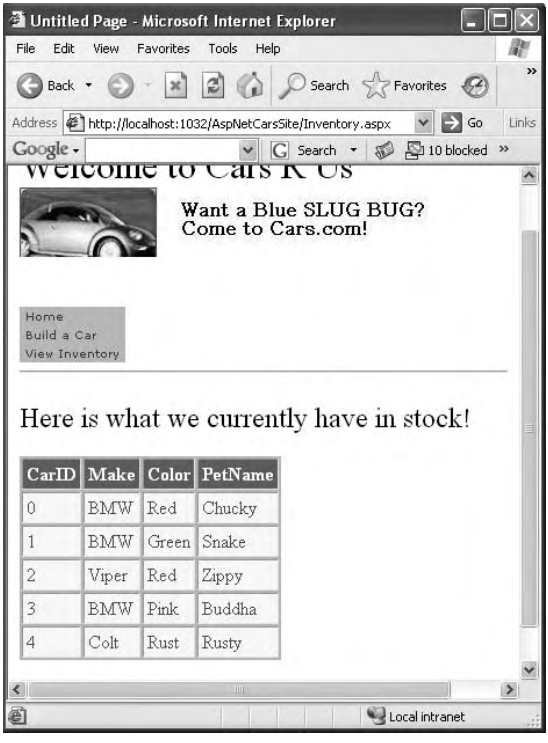


Figure 23-25. *The no-code* `GridView`

Enabling Sorting and Paging

The `GridView` control can easily be configured for sorting (via column name hyperlinks) and paging (via numeric or next/previous hyperlinks). To do so, activate the inline editor and check the appropriate options (see Figure 23-26).



Figure 23-26. *Enabling paging and sorting*

When you run your page again, you will be able to sort your data by clicking the column names and scrolling through your data via the paging links (provided you have enough records in the Inventory table!).

Enabling In-Place Editing

The final detail of this page is to enable the `GridView` control's support for in-place activation. To do so, open the inline editor for the `SqlDataSource` and select Configure Data Source. Skip past the first two steps of this wizard, but on Step 3, click the Advanced button and check the first option (see Figure 23-27).

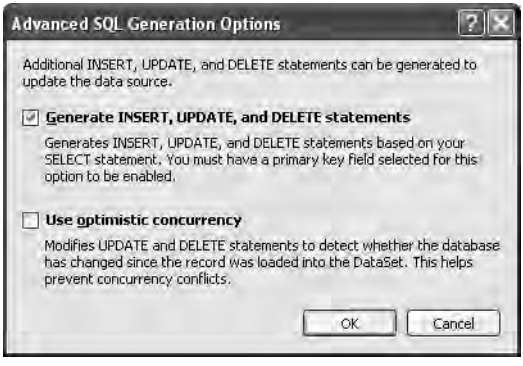

Advanced SQL Generation Options
Additional INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE statements can be generated to update the data source.
Generate INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE statements
Generates INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE statements based on your SELECT statement. You must have a primary key field selected for this option to be enabled.
Use optimistic concurrency
Modifies UPDATE and DELETE statements to detect whether the database has changed since the record was loaded into the DataSet. This helps prevent concurrency conflicts.
OK
Cancel

Figure 23-27. *Generating the remaining SQL statements*

If you examine the HTML definition of the control, you will now find the following that the `SqlDataSource` has been equipped with a `DeleteCommand`, `InsertCommand`, and `UpdateCommand` (each of which is making use of parameterized queries):

```
<asp:SqlDataSource ID="CarsDataSource" runat="server"
ConnectionString=
  "Data Source=localhost;Initial Catalog=Cars;Integrated Security=True"
```

```
ProviderName="System.Data.SqlClient"
SelectCommand="SELECT * FROM [Inventory]"
DeleteCommand="DELETE FROM [Inventory] WHERE [CarID] = @original_CarID"
InsertCommand="INSERT INTO [Inventory] ([CarID], [Make], [Color], [PetName]) VALUES
(@CarID, @Make, @Color, @PetName)"
UpdateCommand="UPDATE [Inventory] SET
[Make] = @Make, [Color] = @Color, [PetName] = @PetName WHERE [CarID] =
@original_CarID">
...
</asp:SqlDataSource>
```

As well, you are provided with a `SqlDataSource` component giving additional markup that defines the parameter objects for the parameterized queries:

```
<DeleteParameters>
    <asp:Parameter Name="original_CarID" Type="Int32" />
</DeleteParameters>
<UpdateParameters>
    <asp:Parameter Name="Make" Type="String" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="Color" Type="String" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="PetName" Type="String" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="original_CarID" Type="Int32" />
</UpdateParameters>
<InsertParameters>
    <asp:Parameter Name="CarID" Type="Int32" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="Make" Type="String" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="Color" Type="String" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="PetName" Type="String" />
</InsertParameters>
```

The final step is to enable editing and deleting support via the inline editor of the `GridView` (see Figure 23-28).

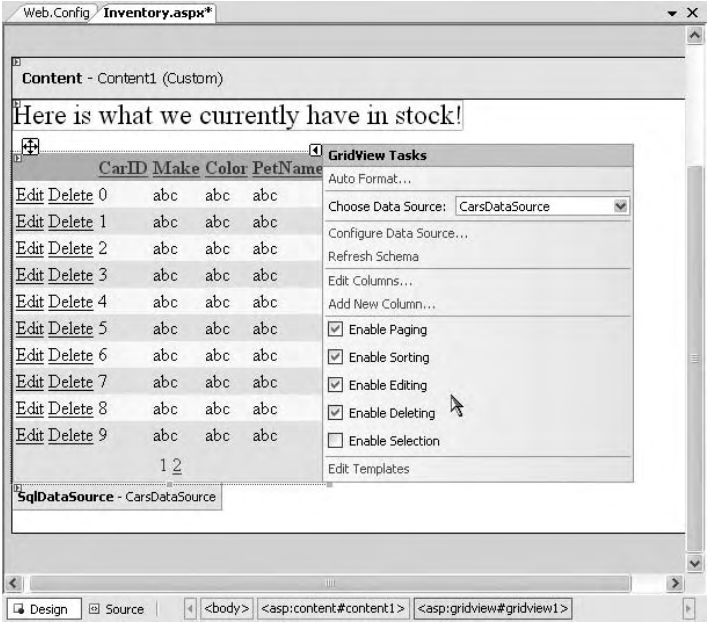


Figure 23-28. *Enabling editing and deleting support*

Sure enough, when you navigate back to the `Inventory.aspx` page, you are able to edit and delete records (see Figure 23-29).

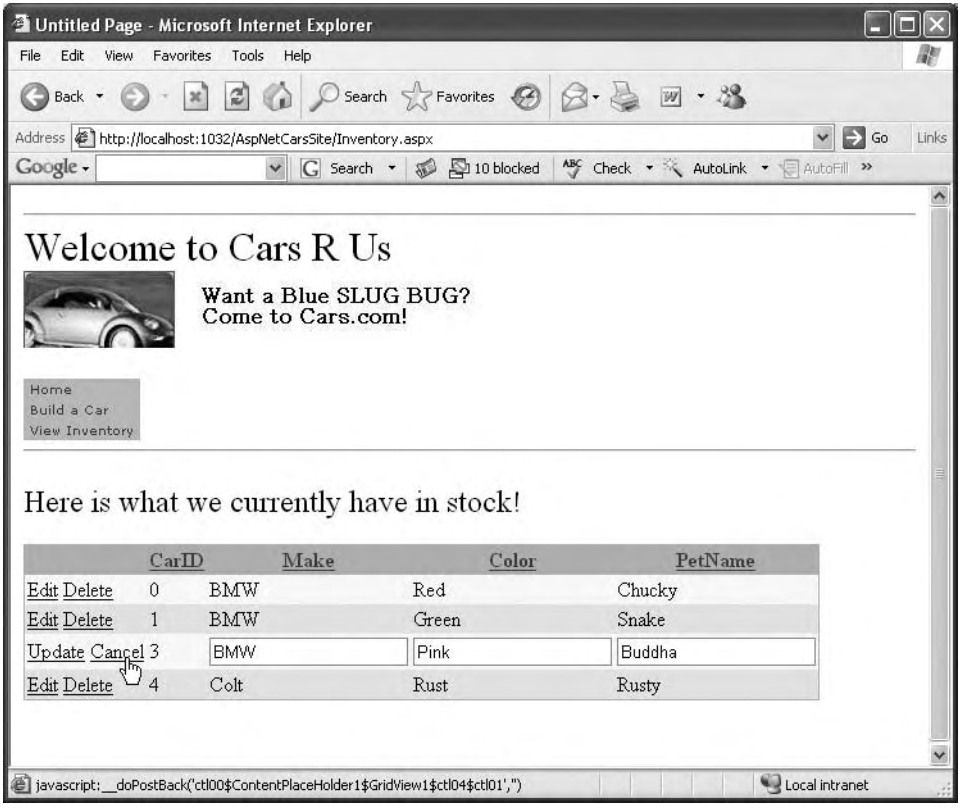

Untitled Page - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://localhost:1032/AspNetCarsSite/Inventory.aspx
Go Links
Google Search 10 blocked Check AutoLink AutoFill
Welcome to Cars R Us
Want a Blue SLUG BUG?
Come to Cars.com!
Home
Build a Car
View Inventory
Here is what we currently have in stock!
CarID Make Color PetName
Edit Delete 0 BMW Red Chucky
Edit Delete 1 BMW Green Snake
Update Cancel 3 BMW Pink Buddha
Edit Delete 4 Colt Rust Rusty
javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$ContentPlaceHolder1$GridView1$ctl04$ctl01','')
Local intranet

Figure 23-29. *The grids of all grids*

Designing the Build a Car Content Page

The final task for this example is to design the `BuildCar.aspx` content page. Insert this current project (via the WebSite ➤ Add Content Page menu option). This new page will make use of the ASP.NET 2.0 `Wizard` web control, which provides a simple way to walk the end user through a series of related steps. Here, the steps in question will simulate the act of building an automobile for purchase.

Place a descriptive `Label` and `Wizard` control onto the content area. Next, activate the inline editor for the `Wizard` and click the Add/Remove WizardSteps link. Add a total of four steps, as shown in Figure 23-30.

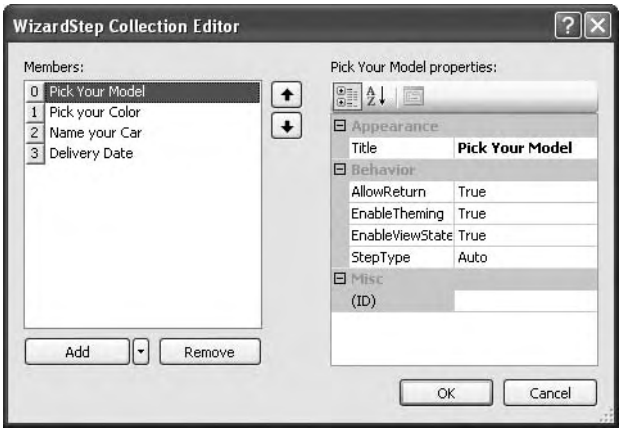


Figure 23-30. *Configuring* `Wizard` *steps*

Once you have defined these steps, you will notice that the `Wizard` defines an empty content area where you can now drag and drop controls for the currently selected step. For this example, update each step with the following UI elements (be sure to provide a descent ID value for each item using the Properties window):

- *Pick Your Model*: A single `TextBox` control
- *Pick Your Color*: A single `ListBox` control
- *Name Your Car*: A single `TextBox` control
- *Delivery Date*: A `Calendar` control

The `ListBox` control is the only UI element of the `Wizard` that requires additional steps. Select this item on the designer (making sure your first select the Pick Your Color link) and fill this widget with a set of colors using the `Items` property of the Properties window. Once you do, you will find markup much like the following within the scope of the `Wizard` definition:

```
<asp:ListBox ID="ListBoxColors" runat="server" Width="237px">
  <asp:ListItem>Purple</asp:ListItem>
  <asp:ListItem>Green</asp:ListItem>
  <asp:ListItem>Red</asp:ListItem>
  <asp:ListItem>Yellow</asp:ListItem>
  <asp:ListItem>Pea Soup Green</asp:ListItem>
  <asp:ListItem>Black</asp:ListItem>
  <asp:ListItem>Lime Green</asp:ListItem>
</asp:ListBox>
```

Now that you have defined each of the steps, you can handle the `FinishButtonClick` event for the autogenerated Finish button. Within the server-side event handler, obtain the selections from each UI element and build a description string that is assigned to the `Text` property of an additional `Label` type named `lblOrder`:

```
protected void carWizard_FinishButtonClick(object sender,
  WizardNavigationEventArgs e)
{
    // Get each value.
    string order = string.Format("{0}, your {1} {2} will arrive on {3}.",
```

```
        txtCarPetName.Text, ListBoxColors.SelectedValue,
        txtCarModel.Text, carCalendar.SelectedDate.ToShortDateString());
    // Assign to label
    lblOrder.Text = order;
}
```

At this point your AspNetCarSite is complete. Figure 23-31 shows the `Wizard` in action.

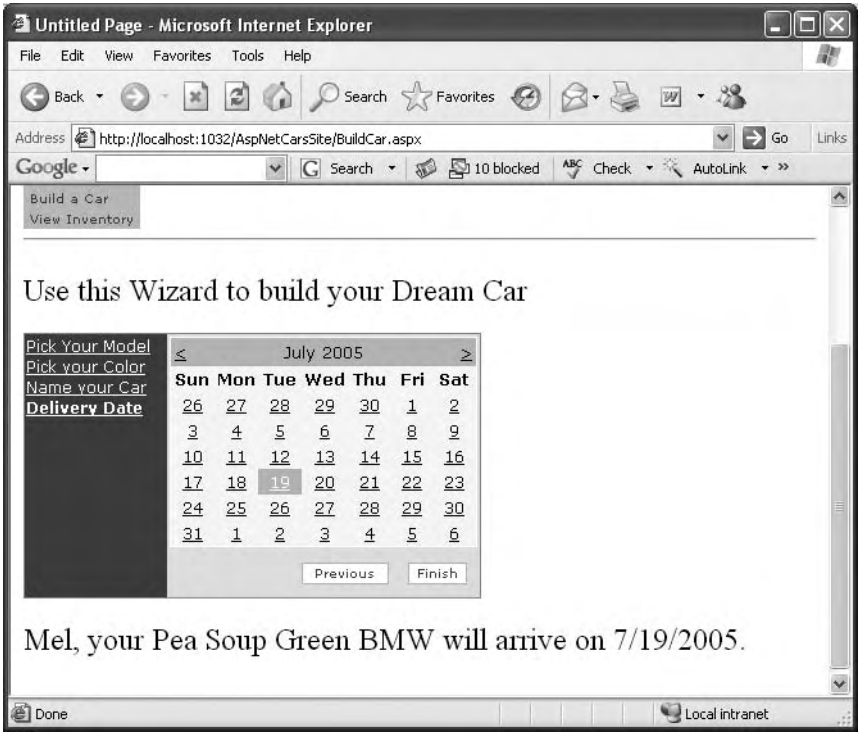

Untitled Page - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://localhost:1032/AspNetCarsSite/BuildCar.aspx
Go Links
Google Search 10 blocked Check AutoLink
Build a Car
View Inventory
Use this Wizard to build your Dream Car
Pick Your Model
Pick your Color
Name your Car
Delivery Date
July 2005
Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
26 27 28 29 30 1 2
3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20 21 22 23
24 25 26 27 28 29 30
31 1 2 3 4 5 6
Previous
Finish
Mel, your Pea Soup Green BMW will arrive on 7/19/2005.
Done
Local intranet

Figure 23-31. *The* `Wizard` *in action*

That wraps up our examination of various UI web controls. To be sure, there are many other widgets we haven't covered here. You should feel comfortable, though, with the basic programming model. To wrap things up for this chapter, let's look at the validation controls.

■ **Source Code** The AspNetCarsSite files are included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

The Role of the Validation Controls

The final group of Web Form controls we will examine is termed *validation controls*. Unlike the other Web Form controls we've examined, validator controls are not used to emit HTML, but are used to emit client-side JavaScript (and possibly server-side operations) for the purpose of form validation. As illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, client-side form validation is quite useful in that you can ensure that various constraints are in place before posting back to the web server, thereby avoiding expensive round-trips. Table 23-11 gives a rundown of the ASP.NET validation controls.

Table 23-11. *ASP.NET Validation Controls*

Control	Meaning in Life
`CompareValidator`	Validates that the value of an input control is equal to a given value of another input control or a fixed constant.
`CustomValidator`	Allows you to build a custom validation function that validates a given control.
`RangeValidator`	Determines that a given value is in a predetermined range.
`RegularExpressionValidator`	Checks if the value of the associated input control matches the pattern of a regular expression.
`RequiredFieldValidator`	Ensures that a given input control contains a value (i.e., is not empty).
`ValidationSummary`	Displays a summary of all validation errors of a page in a list, bulleted list, or single-paragraph format. The errors can be displayed inline and/or in a pop-up message box.

All of the validator controls ultimately derive from a common base class named `System.Web.UI.WebControls.BaseValidator`, and therefore they have a set of common features. Table 23-12 documents the key members.

Table 23-12. *Common Properties of the ASP.NET Validators*

Member	Meaning in Life
`ControlToValidate`	Gets or sets the input control to validate
`Display`	Gets or sets the display behavior of the error message in a validation control
`EnableClientScript`	Gets or sets a value indicating whether client-side validation is enabled
`ErrorMessage`	Gets or sets the text for the error message
`ForeColor`	Gets or sets the color of the message displayed when validation fails

To illustrate the basics of working with validation controls, let's create a new Web Site project named ValidatorCtrls. To begin, place four `TextBox` types (with four corresponding and descriptive `Labels`) onto your page. Next, place a `RequiredFieldValidator`, `RangeValidator`, `RegularExpressionValidator`, and `CompareValidator` type adjacent to each respective field. Finally, add a single `Button` and final `Label` (see Figure 23-32).

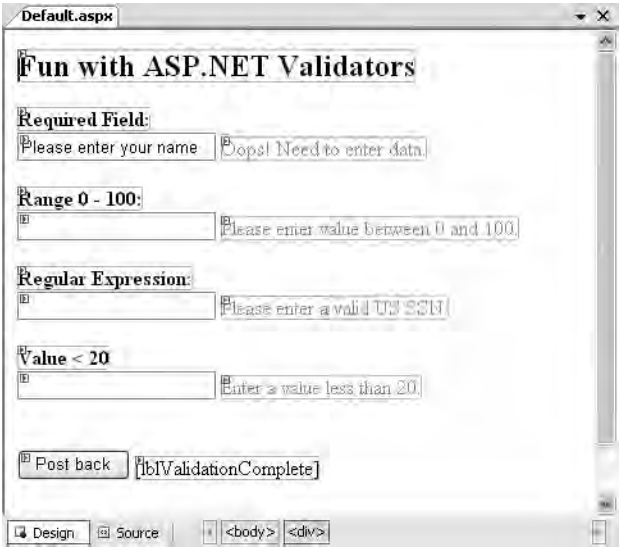


Figure 23-32. *The items to be validated*

Now that you have a UI, let's walk though the process of configuring each member.

The RequiredFieldValidator

Configuring the `RequiredFieldValidator` is straightforward. Simply set the `ErrorMessage` and `ControlToValidate` properties accordingly using the Visual Studio 2005 Properties window. The resulting `*.aspx` definition is as follows:

```
<asp:RequiredFieldValidator ID="RequiredFieldValidator1"
runat="server" ControlToValidate="txtRequiredField"
ErrorMessage="Oops!  Need to enter data.">
</asp:RequiredFieldValidator>
```

One nice thing about the `RequiredFieldValidator` is that it supports an `InitialValue` property. You can use this property to ensure that the user enters any value other than the initial value in the related `TextBox`. For example, when the user first posts to a page, you may wish to configure a `TextBox` to contain the value "Please enter your name". Now, if you did not set the `InitialValue` property of the `RequiredFieldValidator`, the runtime would assume that the string "Please enter your name" is valid. Thus, to ensure a required `TextBox` is valid only when the user enters anything other than "Please enter your name", configure your widgets as follows:

```
<asp:RequiredFieldValidator ID="RequiredFieldValidator1"
runat="server" ControlToValidate="txtRequiredField"
ErrorMessage="Oops!  Need to enter data."
InitialValue="Please enter your name">
</asp:RequiredFieldValidator>
```

The RegularExpressionValidator

The `RegularExpressionValidator` can be used when you wish to apply a pattern against the characters entered within a given input field. To ensure that a given `TextBox` contains a valid U.S. Social Security number, you could define the widget as follows:

```
<asp:RegularExpressionValidator ID="RegularExpressionValidator1"
runat="server" ControlToValidate="txtRegExp"
ErrorMessage="Please enter a valid US SSN."
ValidationExpression="\d{3}-\d{2}-\d{4}">
</asp:RegularExpressionValidator>
```

Notice how the `RegularExpressionValidator` defines a `ValidationExpression` property. If you have never worked with regular expressions before, all you need to be aware of for this example is that they are used to match a given string pattern. Here, the expression `"\d{3}-\d{2}\d{4}"` is capturing a standard U.S. Social Security number of the form xxx-xx-xxxx (where x is any digit).

This particular regular expression is fairly self-explanatory; however, assume you wish to test for a valid Japanese phone number. The correct expression now becomes much more complex: `"(0\d{1,4}-|\(0\d{1,4}\) ?)?\d{1,4}-\d{4}"`. The good news is that when you select the `ValidationExpression` property using the Properties window, you can pick from a predefined set of common regular expressions (see Figure 23-33).

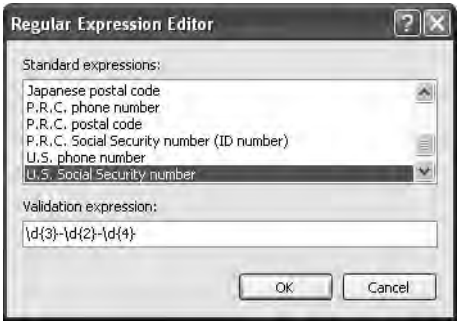


Figure 23-33. *Creating a regular expression via Visual Studio 2005*

■ **Note** If you are really into regular expressions, you will be happy to know that the .NET platform supplies two namespaces (`System.Text.RegularExpressions` and `System.Web.RegularExpressions`) devoted to the programmatic manipulation of such patterns.

The RangeValidator

In addition to a `MinimumValue` and `MaximumValue` property, `RangeValidators` have a property named `Type`. Because you are interested in testing the user-supplied input against a range of whole numbers, you need to specify `Integer` (which is *not* the default!):

```
 <asp:RangeValidator ID="RangeValidator1"
runat="server" ControlToValidate="txtRange"
ErrorMessage="Please enter value between 0 and 100."
MaximumValue="100" MinimumValue="0" Type="Integer">
</asp:RangeValidator>
```

The RangeValidator can also be used to test if a given value is between a currency value, date, floating-point number, or string data (the default setting).

The CompareValidator

Finally, notice that the CompareValidator supports an Operator property:

```
<asp:CompareValidator ID="CompareValidator1" runat="server"
ControlToValidate="txtComparison"
ErrorMessage="Enter a value less than 20." Operator="LessThan"
ValueToCompare="20">
</asp:CompareValidator>
```

Given that the role of this validator is to compare the value in the text box against another value using a binary operator, it should be no surprise that the Operator property may be set to values such as LessThan, GreaterThan, Equal, and NotEqual. Also note that the ValueToCompare is used to establish a value to compare against.

■ **Note** The CompareValidator can also be configured to compare a value within another Web Form control (rather than a hard-coded value) using the ControlToValidate property.

To finish up the code for this page, handle the Click event for the Button type and inform the user he has succeeded in the validation logic:

```
protected void btnPostback_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    lblValidationComplete.Text = "You passed validation!";
}
```

Now, navigate to this page using your browser of choice. At this point, you should not see any noticeable changes. However, when you attempt to click the Submit button after entering bogus data, your error message is suddenly visible. Once you enter valid data, the error messages are removed and postback occurs.

If you look at the HTML rendered by the browser, you see that the validator controls generate a client-side JavaScript function that makes use of a specific library of JavaScript functions (contained in the WebUIValidation.js file) that is automatically downloaded to the user's machine. Once the validation has occurred, the form data is posted back to the server, where the ASP.NET runtime will perform the *same* validation tests on the web server (just to ensure that no along-the-wire tampering has taken place).

On a related note, if the HTTP request was sent by a browser that does not support client-side JavaScript, all validation will occur on the server. In this way, you can program against the validator controls without being concerned with the target browser; the returned HTML page redirects the error processing back to the web server.

Creating Validation Summaries

The final validation-centric topic we will examine here is the use of the ValidationSummary widget. Currently, each of your validators displays its error message at the exact place in which it was positioned at design time. In many cases, this may be exactly what you are looking for. However, on a complex form with numerous input widgets, you may not want to have random blobs of red text pop up. Using the ValidationSummary type, you can instruct all of your validation types to display their error messages at a specific location on the page.

The first step is to simply place a `ValidationSummary` on your `*.aspx` file. You may optionally set the `HeaderText` property of this type as well as the `DisplayMode`, which by default will list all error messages as a bulleted list.

```
<asp:ValidationSummary id="ValidationSummary1"
style="Z-INDEX: 123; LEFT: 152px; POSITION: absolute; TOP: 320px"
runat="server" Width="353px"
HeaderText="Here are the things you must correct.">
</asp:ValidationSummary>
```

Next, you need to set the `Display` property to `None` for each of the individual validators (e.g., `RequiredFieldValidator`, `RangeValidator`, etc.) on the page. This will ensure that you do not see duplicate error messages for a given validation failure (one in the summary pane and another at the validator's location).

Last but not least, if you would rather have the error messages displayed using a client-side `MessageBox`, set the `ShowMessageBox` property to true and the `ShowSummary` property to false.

■ **Source Code** The ValidatorCtrls project is included under the Chapter 23 subdirectory.

Summary

Building web applications requires a different frame of mind than is used to assemble traditional desktop applications. In this chapter, you began with a quick and painless review of some core web atoms, including HTML, HTTP, the role of client-side scripting, and server-side scripts using classic ASP.

The bulk of this chapter was spent examining the architecture of an ASP.NET page. As you have seen, each `*.aspx` file in your project has an associated `System.Web.UI.Page`-derived class. Using this OO approach, ASP.NET allows you to build more reusable and OO-aware systems. This chapter examined the use of master pages and various Web Form controls (including the new `GridView` and `Wizard` types). As you have seen, these GUI widgets are in charge of emitting HTML tags to the client side. The validation controls are server-side widgets that are responsible for rendering client-side JavaScript to perform form validation, without incurring a round-trip to the server.

CHAPTER 24

ASP.NET 2.0 Web Applications

The previous chapter concentrated on the composition and behavior of ASP.NET pages and the web controls they contain. This chapter builds on these basics by examining the role of the `HttpApplication` type. As you will see, the functionality of `HttpApplication` allows you to intercept numerous events that enable you to treat your web applications as a cohesive unit, rather than a set of stand-alone `*.aspx` files.

In addition to investigating the `HttpApplication` type, this chapter also addresses the all-important topic of state management. Here you will learn the role of view state, control state, and session- and application-level variables, as well as a state-centric entity provided by ASP.NET termed the *application cache*. Once you have a solid understanding of the state management techniques offered by the .NET platform, the chapter wraps up with a discussion of the role of the `Web.config` file and shows various configuration-centric techniques.

The Issue of State

At the beginning of the last chapter, I pointed out that HTTP is a *stateless* wire protocol. This very fact makes web development extremely different from the process of building an executable assembly. For example, when you are building a Windows Forms application, you can rest assured that any member variables defined in the `Form`-derived class will typically exist in memory until the user explicitly shuts down the executable:

```
public partial class MainWindow : Form
{
     // State data!
     private string userFavoriteCar;
...
}
```

In the world of the World Wide Web, however, you are not afforded the same luxurious assumption. To prove the point, create a new ASP.NET website (named SimpleStateExample) that has a single `*.aspx` file. Within the code-behind file, define a page-level string variable named `userFavoriteCar`:

```
public partial class _Default : Page
{
     // State data?
     private string userFavoriteCar;
     ...
}
```

Next, construct the web UI as shown in Figure 24-1.

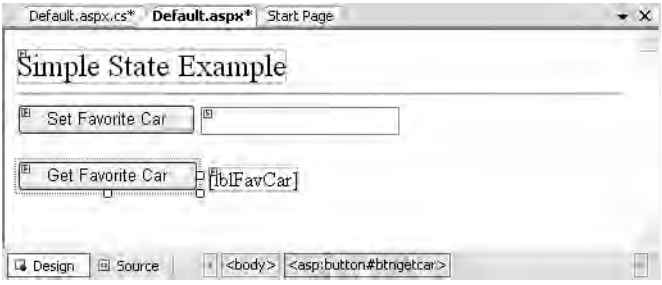


Figure 24-1. *The UI for the simple state page*

The server-side `Click` event handler for the Set button will allow the user to assign the string variable using the value within the `TextBox`:

```
protected void btnSetCar_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Store favorite car in member variable.
     userFavoriteCar = txtFavCar.Text;
}
```

while the `Click` event handler for the Get button will display the current value of the member variable within the page's `Label` widget:

```
protected void btnGetCar_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Set label text to value of member variable.
     lblFavCar.Text = userFavoriteCar;
}
```

Now, if you were building a Windows Forms application, you would be right to assume that once the user sets the initial value, it would be remembered throughout the life of the desktop application. Sadly, when you run this web application, you will find that each time you post back to the web server, the value of the `userFavoriteCar` string variable is set back to the initial empty value; therefore, the `Label`'s text is continuously empty.

Again, given that HTTP has no clue how to automatically remember data once the HTTP response has been sent, it stands to reason that the `Page` object is destroyed instantly. Therefore, when the client posts back to the `*.aspx` file, a *new* `Page` object is constructed that will reset any page-level member variables. This is clearly a major dilemma. Imagine how painful online shopping would be if every time you posted back to the web server, any and all information you previously entered (such as the items you wish to purchase) were discarded. When you wish to remember information regarding the users who are logged on to your site, you need to make use of various state management techniques.

■ **Note** This issue is in no way limited to ASP.NET. Java servlets, CGI applications, classic ASP, and PHP applications all must contend with the thorny issue of state management.

To remember the value of the `userFavoriteCar` string type between postbacks, you are required to store the value of this string type within a session variable. You will examine the exact details of session state in the pages that follow. For the sake of completion, however, here are the necessary

updates for the current page (note that you are no longer using the private string member variable, therefore feel free to comment out or remove the definition altogether):

```
protected void btnSetCar_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     Session["UserFavCar"] = txtFavCar.Text;
}
protected void btnGetCar_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     lblFavCar.Text =  (string)Session["UserFavCar"];
}
```

If you now run the application, the value of your favorite automobile will be preserved across postbacks, thanks to the `HttpSessionState` object manipulated with the inherited `Session` property.

■ **Source Code** The SimpleStateExample files are included under the Chapter 24 subdirectory.

ASP.NET State Management Techniques

ASP.NET provides several mechanisms that you can use to maintain stateful information in your web applications. Specifically, you have the following options:

- Make use of ASP.NET view state.
- Make use of ASP.NET control state.
- Define application-level variables.
- Make use of the cache object.
- Define session-level variables.
- Interact with cookie data.

We'll examine the details of each approach in turn, beginning with the topic of ASP.NET view state.

Understanding the Role of ASP.NET View State

The term *view state* has been thrown out numerous times here and in the previous chapter without a formal definition, so let's demystify this term once and for all. Under classic ASP, web developers were required to manually repopulate the values of the incoming form widgets during the process of constructing the outgoing HTTP response. For example, if the incoming HTTP request contained five text boxes with specific values, the `*.asp` file needed to extract the current values (via the `Form` or `QueryString` collections of the `Request` object) and manually place them back into the HTTP response stream (needless to say, this was a drag). If the developer failed to do so, the caller was presented with a set of five empty text boxes!

Under ASP.NET, we are no longer required to manually scrape out and repopulate the values contained within the HTML widgets because the ASP.NET runtime will automatically embed a hidden form field (named `__VIEWSTATE`), which will flow between the browser and a specific page. The data assigned to this field is a Base64-encoded string that contains a set of name/value pairs that represent the values of each GUI widget on the page at hand.

The `System.Web.UI.Page` base class's `Init` event handler is the entity in charge of reading the incoming values found within the `__VIEWSTATE` field to populate the appropriate member variables in the derived class (which is why it is risky at best to access the state of a web widget within the scope of a page's `Init` event handler).

Also, just before the outgoing response is emitted back to the requesting browser, the __VIEWSTATE data is used to repopulate the form's widgets, to ensure that the current values of the HTML widgets appear as they did prior to the previous postback.

Clearly, the best thing about this aspect of ASP.NET is that it just happens without any work on your part. Of course, you are always able to interact with, alter, or disable this default functionality if you so choose. To understand how to do this, let's see a concrete view state example.

Demonstrating View State

First, create a new ASP.NET web application called ViewStateApp. On your initial *.aspx page, add a single ASP.NET ListBox web control and a single Button type. Handle the Click event for the Button to provide a way for the user to post back to the web server:

```
protected void btnDoPostBack_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // This is just here to allow a postback.
}
```

Now, using the Visual Studio 2005 Properties window, access the Items property and add four ListItems to the ListBox. The result looks like this:

```
<asp:ListBox ID="myListBox" runat="server">
    <asp:ListItem>Item One</asp:ListItem>
    <asp:ListItem>Item Two</asp:ListItem>
    <asp:ListItem>Item Three</asp:ListItem>
    <asp:ListItem>Item Four</asp:ListItem>
</asp:ListBox>
```

Note that you are hard-coding the items in the ListBox directly within the *.aspx file. As you already know, all <asp:> definitions found within an HTML form will automatically render back their HTML representation before the final HTTP response (provided they have the runat="server" attribute).

The <%@Page%> directive has an optional attribute called enableViewState that by default is set to true. To disable this behavior, simply update the <%@Page%> directive as follows:

```
<%@ Page EnableViewState ="false"
Language="C#" AutoEventWireup="true"
CodeFile="Default.aspx.cs" Inherits="_Default" %>
```

So, what exactly does it mean to disable view state? The answer is, it depends. Given the previous definition of the term, you would think that if you disable view state for an *.aspx file, the values within your ListBox would not be remembered between postbacks to the web server. However, if you were to run this application as is, you might be surprised to find that the information in the ListBox is retained regardless of how many times you post back to the page. In fact, if you examine the source HTML returned to the browser, you may be further surprised to see that the hidden __VIEWSTATE field is *still present*:

```
<input type="hidden" name="__VIEWSTATE" id="__VIEWSTATE"
value="/wEPDwUKMTY1MjcxNTcxNmRkOXbNzW5+R2VDhNWtEtHMM+yhxvU=" />
```

The reason why the view state string is still visible is the fact that the *.aspx file has explicitly defined the ListBox items within the scope of the HTML <form> tags. Thus, the ListBox items will be autogenerated each time the web server responds to the client.

However, assume that your ListBox is dynamically populated within the code-behind file rather than within the HTML <form> definition. First, remove the <asp:ListItem> declarations from the current *.aspx file:

```
<asp:ListBox ID="myListBox" runat="server">
</asp:ListBox>
```

Next, fill the list items within the `Load` event handler of within your code-behind file:

```
protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     if(!IsPostBack)
     {
          // Fill ListBox dynamically!
          myListBox.Items.Add("Item One");
          myListBox.Items.Add("Item Two");
          myListBox.Items.Add("Item Three");
          myListBox.Items.Add("Item Four");
     }
}
```

If you post to this updated page, you will find that the first time the browser requests the page, the values in the `ListBox` are present and accounted for. However, on postback, the `ListBox` is suddenly *empty*. The first rule of ASP.NET view state is that its effect is only realized when you have widgets whose values are dynamically generated through code. If you hard-code values within the `*.aspx` file's `<form>` tags, the state of these items is always remembered across postbacks (even when you set `enableViewState` to `false` for a given page).

Furthermore, view state is most useful when you have a dynamically populated web widget that always needs to be repopulated for each and every postback (such as an ASP.NET `GridView`, which is always filled using a database hit). If you did not disable view state for pages that contain such widgets, the entire state of the grid is represented within the hidden `__VIEWSTATE` field. Given that complex pages may contain numerous ASP.NET web controls, you can imagine how large this string would become. As the payload of the HTTP request/response cycle could become quite heavy, this may become a problem for the dial-up web surfers of the world. In cases such as these, you may find faster throughput if you disable view state for the page.

If the idea of disabling view state for the entire `*.aspx` file seems a bit too aggressive, recall that every descendent of the `System.Web.UI.Control` base class inherits the `EnableViewState` property, which makes it very simple to disable view state on a control-by-control basis:

```
<asp:GridView id="myHugeDynamicallyFilledDataGrid" runat="server"
 EnableViewState="false">
</asp:GridView>
```

■ **Note** Be aware that ASP.NET pages reserve a small part of the `__VIEWSTATE` string for internal use. Given this, you will find that the `__VIEWSTATE` field will still appear in the client-side browser even when the entire page (and all the controls) have disabled view state.

Adding Custom View State Data

In addition to the `EnableViewState` property, the `System.Web.UI.Control` base class also provides an inherited property named `ViewState`. Under the hood, this property provides access to a `System.Web.UI.StateBag` type, which represents all the data contained within the `__VIEWSTATE` field. Using the indexer of the `StateBag` type, you can embed custom information within the hidden `__VIEWSTATE` form field using a set of name/value pairs. Here's a simple example:

```
protected void btnAddToVS_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     ViewState["CustomViewStateItem"] = "Some user data";
     lblVSValue.Text = (string)ViewState["CustomViewStateItem"];
}
```

Because the `System.Web.UI.StateBag` type has been designed to operate on any type-derived `System.Object`, when you wish to access the value of a given key, you will need to explicitly cast it into the correct underlying data type (in this case, a `System.String`). Be aware, however, that values placed within the `__VIEWSTATE` field cannot literally be *any* object. Specifically, the only valid types are strings, integers, Booleans, `ArrayLists`, `Hashtables`, or an array of these types.

So, given that `*.aspx` pages may insert custom bits of information into the `__VIEWSTATE` string, the next logical question is when you would want to do so. Most of the time, custom view state data is best suited for user-specific preferences. For example, you may establish a point of view-state data that specifies how a user wishes to view the UI of a `GridView` (such as a sort order). View state data is not well suited for full-blown user data, such as items in a shopping cart, cached `DataSets`, or whatnot. When you need to store this sort of complex information, you are required to work with session data. Before we get to that point, you need to understand the role of the `Global.asax` file.

■ **Source Code** The ViewStateApp files are included under the Chapter 24 subdirectory.

A Brief Word Regarding Control State

As of ASP.NET 2.0, a control's state data can now be persisted via *control state* rather than view state. This technique is most helpful if you have written a custom ASP.NET web control that must remember data between round-trips. While the `ViewState` property can be used for this purpose, if view state is disabled at a page level, the custom control is effectively broken. For this very reason, web controls now support a `ControlState` property.

Control state works identically to view state; however, it will not be disabled if view state is disabled at the page level. As mentioned, this feature is most useful for those who are developing custom web controls (a topic not covered in this text). Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for further details.

The Role of the Global.asax File

At this point, an ASP.NET application may seem to be little more than a set of `*.aspx` files and their respective web controls. While you could build a web application by simply linking a set of related web pages, you will most likely need a way to interact with the web application as a whole. To this end, your ASP.NET web applications may choose to include an optional `Global.asax` file via the WebSite ➤ Add New Item menu option (see Figure 24-2).

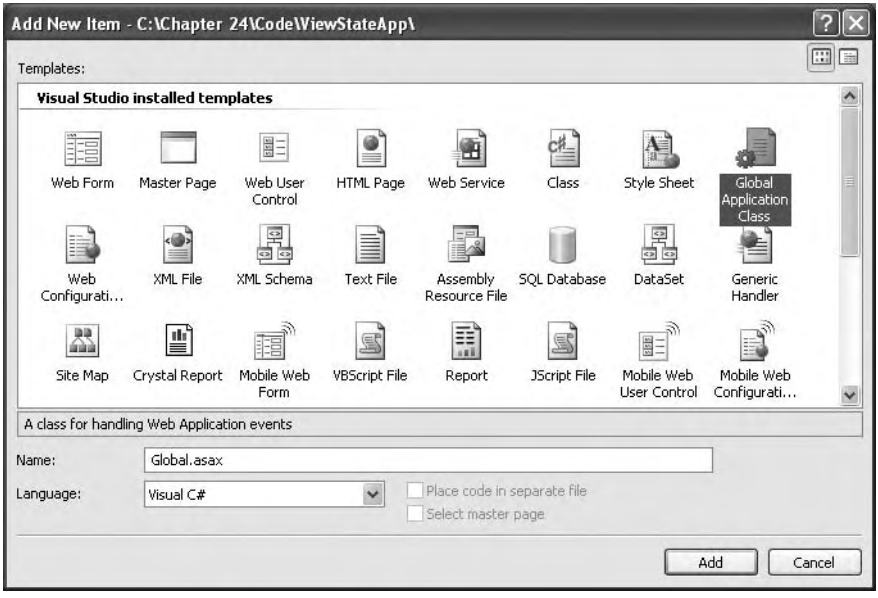


Figure 24-2. *The* `Global.asax` *file*

Simply put, `Global.asax` is just about as close to a traditional double-clickable `*.exe` that we can get in the world of ASP.NET, meaning this type represents the runtime behavior of the website itself. Once you insert a `Global.asax` file into a web project, you will notice it is little more than a `<script>` block containing a set of event handlers:

```
<%@ Application Language="C#" %>
<script runat="server">
    void Application_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Code that runs on application startup
    }
    void Application_End(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        //  Code that runs on application shutdown
    }
    void Application_Error(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Code that runs when an unhandled error occurs
    }
    void Session_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Code that runs when a new session is started
    }
    void Session_End(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // Code that runs when a session ends
    }
</script>
```

Looks can be deceiving, however. At runtime, the code within this `<script>` block is assembled into a class type deriving from `System.Web.HttpApplication`. If you have a background in ASP.NET 1.*x*, you may recall that the `Global.asax` code-behind file literally *did* define a class deriving from `HttpApplication`.

As mentioned, the members defined inside `Global.asax` are in event handlers that allow you to interact with application-level (and session-level) events. Table 24-1 documents the role of each member.

Table 24-1. *Core Types of the* `System.Web` *Namespace*

Event Handler	Meaning in Life
`Application_Start()`	This event handler is called the very first time the web application is launched. Thus, this event will fire exactly once over the lifetime of a web application. This is an ideal place to define application-level data used throughout your web application.
`Application_End()`	This event handler is called when the application is shutting down. This will occur when the last user times out or if you manually shut down the application via IIS.
`Session_Start()`	This event handler is fired when a new user logs on to your application. Here you may establish any user-specific data points.
`Session_End()`	This event handler is fired when a user's session has terminated (typically through a predefined timeout).
`Application_Error()`	This is a global error handler that will be called when an unhandled exception is thrown by the web application.

The Global Last Chance Exception Event Handler

First, let me point out the role of the `Application_Error()` event handler. Recall that a specific page may handle the `Error` event to process any unhandled exception that occurred within the scope of the page itself. In a similar light, the `Application_Error()` event handler is the final place to handle an exception that was not handled by a specific page. As with the page-level `Error` event, you are able to access the specific `System.Exception` using the inherited `Server` property:

```
void Application_Error(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     Exception ex = Server.GetLastError();
     Response.Write(ex.Message);
     Server.ClearError();
}
```

Given that the `Application_Error()` event handler is the last chance exception handler for your web application, odds are that you would rather not report the error to the user, but you would like to log this information to the web server's event log, for example:

```
<%@ Import Namespace = "System.Diagnostics"%>
...
void Application_Error(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Log last error to event log.
     Exception ex = Server.GetLastError();
     EventLog ev = new EventLog("Application");
     ev.WriteEntry(ex.Message, EventLogEntryType.Error);
     Server.ClearError();
     Response.Write("This app has bombed. Sorry!");
}
```

The HttpApplication Base Class

As mentioned, the `Global.asax` script is dynamically generated into a class deriving from the `System.Web.HttpApplication` base class, which supplies the same sort of functionality as the `System.Web.UI.Page` type. Table 24-2 documents the key members of interest.

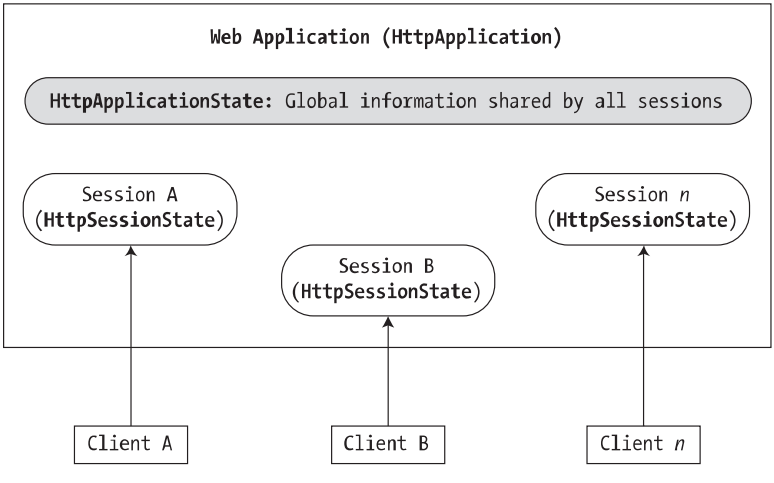
Table 24-2. *Key Members Defined by the* `System.Web.HttpApplication` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Application`	This property allows you to interact with application-level variables, using the exposed `HttpApplicationState` type.
`Request`	This property allows you to interact with the incoming HTTP request (via `HttpRequest`).
`Response`	This property allows you to interact with the incoming HTTP response (via `HttpResponse`).
`Server`	This property gets the intrinsic server object for the current request (via `HttpServerUtility`).
`Session`	This property allows you to interact with session-level variables, using the exposed `HttpSessionState` type.

Understanding the Application/Session Distinction

Under ASP.NET, application state is maintained by an instance of the `HttpApplicationState` type. This class enables you to share global information across all users (and all pages) who are logged on to your ASP.NET application. Not only can application data be shared by all users on your site, but also if one user changes the value of an application-level data point, the change is seen by all others on their next postback.

On the other hand, session state is used to remember information for a specific user (again, such as items in a shopping cart). Physically, a user's session state is represented by the `HttpSessionState` class type. When a new user logs on to an ASP.NET web application, the runtime will automatically assign that user a new session ID, which by default will expire after 20 minutes of inactivity. Thus, if 20,000 users are logged on to your site, you have 20,000 distinct `HttpSessionState` objects, each of which is assigned a unique session ID. The relationship between a web application and web sessions is shown in Figure 24-3.



As you may know, under classic ASP, application- and session-state data is represented using distinct COM objects (e.g., `Application` and `Session`). Under ASP.NET, `Page`-derived types as well as the `HttpApplication` type make use of identically named *properties* (i.e., `Application` and `Session`), which expose the underlying `HttpApplicationState` and `HttpSessionState` types.

Maintaining Application-Level State Data

The `HttpApplicationState` type enables developers to share global information across multiple sessions in an ASP.NET application. For example, you may wish to maintain an applicationwide connection string that can be used by all pages, a common `DataSet` used by multiple pages, or any other piece of data that needs to be accessed on an applicationwide scale. Table 24-3 describes some core members of this type.

Table 24-3. *Members of the* `HttpApplicationState` *Type*

Members	Meaning in Life
`AllKeys`	This property returns an array of `System.String` types that represent all the names in the `HttpApplicationState` type.
`Count`	This property gets the number of item objects in the `HttpApplicationState` type.
`Add()`	This method allows you to add a new name/value pair into the `HttpApplicationState` type. Do note that this method is typically *not* used in favor of the indexer of the `HttpApplicationState` class.
`Clear()`	This method deletes all items in the `HttpApplicationState` type. This is functionally equivalent to the `RemoveAll()` method.
`Lock()` `Unlock()`	These two methods are used when you wish to alter a set of application variables in a thread-safe manner.

`RemoveAll()`
`Remove()`
`RemoveAt()`
	These methods remove a specific item (by string name) within the `HttpApplicationState` type. `RemoveAt()` removes the item via a numerical indexer.

When you create data members that can be shared among all active sessions, you need to establish a set of name/value pairs. In most cases, the most natural place to do so is within the `Application_Start()` event handler of the `HttpApplication`-derived type, for example:

```
void Application_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Set up some application variables.
     Application["SalesPersonOfTheMonth"] = "Chucky";
     Application["CurrentCarOnSale"] = "Colt";
     Application["MostPopularColorOnLot"] = "Black";
}
```

During the lifetime of your web application (which is to say, until the web application is manually shut down or until the final user times out), any user (on any page) may access these values as necessary. Assume you have a page that will display the current discount car within a `Label` via a button click:

```
protected void btnShowCarDiscount_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Must cast the returned System.Object
     // to a System.String!
     lblCurrCarOnSale.Text =
          (string)Application["CurrentCarOnSale"];
}
```

Like the ViewState property, notice how you must cast the value returned from the HttpApplicationState type into the correct underlying type. Now, given that the HttpApplicationState type can hold *any* type, it should stand to reason that you can place custom types (or any .NET type) within your site's application state.

To illustrate this technique, create a new ASP.NET web application named AppState. Assume you would rather maintain the three current application variables within a strongly typed object named CarLotInfo:

```
public class CarLotInfo
{
     public CarLotInfo(string s, string c, string m)
     {
          salesPersonOfTheMonth = s;
          currentCarOnSale = c;
          mostPopularColorOnLot = m;
     }
     // Public for easy access.
     public string salesPersonOfTheMonth;
     public string currentCarOnSale;
     public string mostPopularColorOnLot;
}
```

With this helper class in place, you could modify the Application_Start() event handler as follows:

```
protected void Application_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Place a custom object in the application data sector.
     Application["CarSiteInfo"] =
          new CarLotInfo("Chucky", "Colt", "Black");
}
```

and then access the information using the public field data within a server-side event handler:

```
protected void btnShowAppVariables_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     CarLotInfo appVars =
          ((CarLotInfo)Application["CarSiteInfo"]);
     string appState =
          string.Format("<li>Car on sale: {0}</li>",
          appVars.currentCarOnSale);
     appState +=
          string.Format("<li>Most popular color: {0}</li>",
          appVars.mostPopularColorOnLot);
     appState +=
          string.Format("<li>Big shot SalesPerson: {0}</li>",
          appVars.salesPersonOfTheMonth);
     lblAppVariables.Text = appState;
}
```

If you were now to run this page, you would find that a list of each application variable is displayed on the page's Label type.

Modifying Application Data

You may programmatically update or delete any or all members using members of the HttpApplicationState type during the execution of your web application. For example, to delete a specific item, simply call the Remove() method. If you wish to destroy all application-level data, call RemoveAll():

```
private void CleanAppData()
{
    // Remove a single item via string name.
    Application.Remove("SomeItemIDontNeed");

    // Destroy all application data!
    Application.RemoveAll();
}
```

If you wish to simply change the value of an existing application-level variable, you only need to make a new assignment to the data item in question. Assume your page now supports a new `Button` type that allows your user to change the current hotshot salesperson. The `Click` event handler is as you would expect:

```
protected void btnSetNewSP_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Set the new Salesperson.
     ((CarLotInfo)Application["CarSiteInfo"]).salesPersonOfTheMonth
          = txtNewSP.Text;
}
```

If you run the web application, you will find that the application-level variable has been updated. Furthermore, given that application variables are accessible from all user sessions, if you were to launch three or four instances of your web browser, you would find that if one instance changes the current hotshot salesperson, each of the other browsers displays the new value on postback.

Understand that if you have a situation where a set of application-level variables must be updated as a unit, you risk the possibility of data corruption (given that it is technically possible that an application-level data point may be changed while another user is attempting to access it!). While you could take the long road and manually lock down the logic using threading primitives of the `System.Threading` namespace, the `HttpApplicationState` type has two methods, `Lock()` and `Unlock()`, that automatically ensure thread safety:

```
// Safely access related application data.
Application.Lock();
     Application["SalesPersonOfTheMonth"] = "Maxine";
     Application["CurrentBonusedEmployee"] = Application["SalesPersonOfTheMonth"];
Application.Unlock();
```

■ **Note** Much like the C# `lock` statement, if an exception occurs after the call to `Lock()` but before the call to `Unlock()`, the lock will automatically be released.

Handling Web Application Shutdown

The `HttpApplicationState` type is designed to maintain the values of the items it contains until one of two situations occurs: the last user on your site times out (or manually logs out) or someone manually shuts down the website via IIS. In each case, the `Application_Exit()` method of the `HttpApplication`-derived type will automatically be called. Within this event handler, you are able to perform whatever sort of cleanup code is necessary:

```
protected void Application_End(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Write current application variables
     // to a database or whatever else you need to do...
}
```

■ **Source Code** The AppState files are included under the Chapter 24 subdirectory.

Working with the Application Cache

ASP.NET provides a second and more flexible manner to handle applicationwide data. As you recall, the values within the `HttpApplicationState` object remain in memory as long as your web application is alive and kicking. Sometimes, however, you may wish to maintain a piece of application data only for a specific period of time. For example, you may wish to obtain an ADO.NET `DataSet` that is valid for only five minutes. After that time, you may want to obtain a fresh `DataSet` to account for possible user modifications. While it is technically possible to build this infrastructure using `HttpApplicationState` and some sort of handcrafted monitor, your task is greatly simplified using the ASP.NET application cache.

As suggested by its name, the ASP.NET `System.Web.Caching.Cache` object (which is accessible via the `Context.Cache` property) allows you to define an object that is accessible by all users (from all pages) for a fixed amount of time. In its simplest form, interacting with the cache looks identical to interacting with the `HttpApplicationState` type:

```
// Add an item to the cache.
// This item will *not* expire.
Context.Cache["SomeStringItem"] = "This is the string item";
string s = (string)Context.Cache["SomeStringItem"];
```

■ **Note** If you wish to access the `Cache` from within `Global.asax`, you are required to use the `Context` property. However, if you are within the scope of a `System.Web.UI.Page`-derived type, you can make use of the `Cache` object directly.

Now, understand that if you have no interest in automatically updating (or removing) an application-level data point (as seen here), the `Cache` object is of little benefit, as you can directly use the `HttpApplicationState` type. However, when you do wish to have a data point destroyed after a fixed point of time—and optionally be informed when this occurs—the `Cache` type is extremely helpful.

The `System.Web.Caching.Cache` class defines only a small number of members beyond the type's indexer. For example, the `Add()` method can be used to insert a new item into the cache that is not currently defined (if the specified item is already present, `Add()` does nothing). The `Insert()` method will also place a member into the cache. If, however, the item is currently defined, `Insert()` will replace the current item with the new type. Given that this is most often the behavior you will desire, I'll focus on the `Insert()` method exclusively.

Fun with Data Caching

Let's see an example. To begin, create a new ASP.NET web application named `CacheState` and insert a `Global.asax` file. Like an application-level variable maintained by the `HttpApplicationState` type, the `Cache` may hold any `System.Object`-derived type and is often populated within the `Application_Start()` event handler. For this example, the goal is to automatically update the contents of a `DataSet` every 15 seconds. The `DataSet` in question will contain the current set of records from the Inventory table of the Cars database created during our discussion of ADO.NET. Given these stats, update your `Global` class type as so (code analysis to follow):

```
<%@ Application Language="C#" %>
<%@ Import Namespace = "System.Data.SqlClient" %>
<%@ Import Namespace = "System.Data" %>

<script runat="server">
    // Define a static-level Cache member variable.
    static Cache theCache;

    void Application_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // First assign the static 'theCache' variable.
        theCache = Context.Cache;

        // When the application starts up,
        // read the current records in the
        // Inventory table of the Cars DB.
        SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection
         ("data source=localhost;initial catalog=Cars; user id ='sa';pwd=''");
        SqlDataAdapter dAdapt =
             new SqlDataAdapter("Select * From Inventory", cn);
        DataSet theCars = new DataSet();
        dAdapt.Fill(theCars, "Inventory");

        // Now store DataSet in the cache.
        theCache.Insert("AppDataSet",
             theCars, null,
             DateTime.Now.AddSeconds(15),
             Cache.NoSlidingExpiration,
             CacheItemPriority.Default,
             new CacheItemRemovedCallback(UpdateCarInventory));
    }

    // The target for the CacheItemRemovedCallback delegate.
    static void UpdateCarInventory(string key, object item,
         CacheItemRemovedReason reason)
    {
        // Populate the DataSet.
        SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection
        ("data source=localhost;initial catalog=Cars; user id ='sa';pwd=''");
        SqlDataAdapter dAdapt =
             new SqlDataAdapter("Select * From Inventory", cn);
        DataSet theCars = new DataSet();
        dAdapt.Fill(theCars, "Inventory");

        // Now store in the cache.
        theCache.Insert("AppDataSet",
             theCars, null,
             DateTime.Now.AddSeconds(15),
             Cache.NoSlidingExpiration,
             CacheItemPriority.Default,
             new CacheItemRemovedCallback(UpdateCarInventory));
    }
...
</script>
```

First, notice that the Global type has defined a static-level Cache member variable. The reason is that you have also defined a static-level function (UpdateCarInventory()) that needs to access the Cache (recall that static members do not have access to inherited members, therefore you can't use the Context property!).

Inside the Application_Start() event handler, you fill a DataSet and place the object within the application cache. As you would guess, the Context.Cache.Insert() method has been overloaded a number of times. Here, you supply a value for each possible parameter:

```
// Now store in the cache.
theCache.Add("AppDataSet",           // Name used to identify item in the cache.
     theCars,                        // Object to put In the cache.
     null,                           // Any dependencies for this object?
     DateTime.Now. AddSeconds(15),   // How long item will be in cache.
     Cache.NoSlidingExpiration,      // Fixed or sliding time?
     CacheItemPriority.Default,      // Priority level of cache item.
     // Delegate for CacheItemRemove event
     new CacheItemRemovedCallback(UpdateCarInventory));
```

The first two parameters simply make up the name/value pair of the item. The third parameter allows you to define a CacheDependency type (which is null in this case, as you do not have any other entities in the cache that are dependent on the DataSet).

■ **Note** The ability to define a CacheDependency type is quite interesting. For example, you could establish a dependency between a member and an external file. If the contents of the file were to change, the type can be automatically updated. Check out the .NET Framework 2.0 documentation for further details.

The next three parameters are used to define the amount of time the item will be allowed to remain in the application cache and its level of priority. Here, you specify the read-only Cache.NoSlidingExpiration field, which informs the cache that the specified time limit (15 seconds) is absolute. Finally, and most important for this example, you create a new CacheItemRemovedCallback delegate type, and pass in the name of the method to call when the DataSet is purged. As you can see from the signature of the UpdateCarInventory() method, the CacheItemRemovedCallback delegate can only call methods that match the following signature:

```
static void UpdateCarInventory(string key, object item,
   CacheItemRemovedReason reason)
{ ... }
```

So, at this point, when the application starts up, the DataSet is populated and cached. Every 15 seconds, the DataSet is purged, updated, and reinserted into the cache. To see the effects of doing this, you need to create a Page that allows for some degree of user interaction.

Modifying the *.aspx File

Update the UI of your initial *.aspx file as shown in Figure 24-4.



Figure 24-4. *The cache application GUI*

In the page's `Load` event handler, configure your `GridView` to display the current contents of the cached `DataSet` the first time the user posts to the page:

```
protected void Page_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     if(!IsPostBack)
     {
          carsGridView.DataSource =  (DataSet)Cache["AppDataSet"];
          carsGridView.DataBind();
     }
}
```

In the `Click` event handler of the Add this Car button, insert the new record into the Cars database using an ADO.NET `SqlCommand` object. Once the record has been inserted, call a helper function named `RefreshGrid()`, which will update the UI via an ADO.NET `SqlDataReader` (so don't forget to "use" the `System.Data.SqlClient` namespace). Here are the methods in question:

```
protected void btnAddCar_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Update the Inventory table
     // and call RefreshGrid().
     SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
     cn.ConnectionString =
          "User ID=sa;Pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;" +
          "Data Source=(local)";
     cn.Open();
     string sql;
     SqlCommand cmd;
```

```
    // Insert new Car.
    sql = string.Format
        ("INSERT INTO Inventory(CarID, Make, Color, PetName) VALUES" +
        "('{0}', '{1}', '{2}', '{3}')",
        txtCarID.Text, txtCarMake.Text,
        txtCarColor.Text, txtCarPetName.Text);
    cmd = new SqlCommand(sql, cn);
    cmd.ExecuteNonQuery();
    cn.Close();
    RefreshGrid();
}
private void RefreshGrid()
{
    // Populate grid.
    SqlConnection cn = new SqlConnection();
    cn.ConnectionString =
        "User ID=sa;Pwd=;Initial Catalog=Cars;Data Source=(local)";
    cn.Open();
    SqlCommand cmd = new SqlCommand("Select * from Inventory", cn);
    carsGridView.DataSource = cmd.ExecuteReader();
    carsGridView.DataBind();
    cn.Close();
}
```

Now, to test the use of the cache, launch two instances of your web browser and navigate to this `*.aspx` page. At this point, you should see that both `DataGrid`s display identical information. From one instance of the browser, add a new `Car`. Obviously, this results in an updated `GridView` viewable from the browser that initiated the postback.

In the second browser instance, click the Refresh button. You should *not* see the new item, given that the `Page_Load` event handler is reading directly from the cache. (If you did see the value, the 15 seconds had already expired. Either type faster or increase the amount of time the `DataSet` will remain in the cache.) Wait a few seconds and click the Refresh button from the second browser instance one more time. Now you *should* see the new item, given that the `DataSet` in the cache has expired and the `CacheItemRemovedCallback` delegate target method has automatically updated the cached `DataSet`.

As you can see, the major benefit of the `Cache` type is that you can ensure that when a member is removed, you have a chance to respond. In this example, you certainly could avoid using the `Cache` and simply have the `Page_Load()` event handler always read directly from the Cars database. Nevertheless, the point should be clear: the cache allows you to automatically refresh data using .NET delegates.

■ **Note** Unlike the `HttpApplicationState` type, the `Cache` class does not support `Lock()` and `Unlock()` methods. If you need to update interrelated items, you will need to directly make use of the types within the `System.Threading` namespace or the C# `lock` keyword.

■ **Source Code** The CacheState files are included under the Chapter 24 subdirectory.

Maintaining Session Data

So much for our examination of application-level state data. Next, let's check out the role of per-user data stores. As mentioned earlier, a *session* is little more than a given user's interaction with a web application, which is represented via the `HttpSessionState` type. To maintain stateful information for a particular user, the `HttpApplication`-derived type and any `System.Web.UI.Page`-derived types may access the `Session` property. The classic example of the need to maintain per-user data would be an online shopping cart. Again, if ten people all log on to an online store, each individual will maintain a unique set of items that she (may) intend to purchase.

When a new user logs on to your web application, the .NET runtime will automatically assign the user a unique session ID, which is used to identify the user in question. Each session ID is assigned a custom instance of the `HttpSessionState` type to hold on to user-specific data. Inserting or retrieving session data is syntactically identical to manipulating application data, for example:

```
// Add/retrieve a session variable for current user.
Session["DesiredCarColor"] = "Green";
string color = (string) Session["DesiredCarColor"];
```

The `HttpApplication`-derived type allows you to intercept the beginning and end of a session via the `Session_Start()` and `Session_End()` event handlers. Within `Session_Start()`, you can freely create any per-user data items, while `Session_End()` allows you to perform any work you may need to do when the user's session has terminated:

```
<%@ Application Language="C#" %>
<script runat="server">
...
    void Session_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
    void Session_End(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
    }
</script>
```

Like the `HttpApplicationState` type, the `HttpSessionState` may hold any `System.Object`-derived type, including your custom classes. For example, assume you have a new web application (SessionState) that defines a helper class named `UserShoppingCart`:

```
public class UserShoppingCart
{
  public string desiredCar;
  public string desiredCarColor;
  public float downPayment;
  public bool isLeasing;
  public DateTime dateOfPickUp;

  public override string ToString()
  {
    return string.Format
     ("Car: {0}<br>Color: {1}<br>$ Down: {2}<br>Lease: {3}<br>Pick-up Date: {4}",
     desiredCar, desiredCarColor, downPayment, isLeasing,
     dateOfPickUp.ToShortDateString());
   }
}
```

Within the `Session_Start()` event handler, you can now assign each user a new instance of the `UserShoppingCart` class:

```
void Session_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     Session["UserShoppingCartInfo"]
          = new UserShoppingCart();
}
```

As the user traverses your web pages, you are able to pluck out the `UserShoppingCart` instance and fill the fields with user-specific data. For example, assume you have a simple `*.aspx` page that defines a set of input widgets that correspond to each field of the `UserShoppingCart` type and a `Button` used to set the values (see Figure 24-5).



Figure 24-5. *The session application GUI*

The server-side `Click` event handler is straightforward (scrape out values from `TextBox`es and display the shopping cart data on a `Label` type):

```
protected void btnSubmit_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Set current user prefs.
     UserShoppingCart u =
          (UserShoppingCart)Session["UserShoppingCartInfo"];
     u.dateOfPickUp = myCalendar.SelectedDate;
     u.desiredCar = txtCarMake.Text;
     u.desiredCarColor = txtCarColor.Text;
```

```
    u.downPayment = float.Parse(txtDownPayment.Text);
    u.isLeasing = chkIsLeasing.Checked;
    lblUserInfo.Text = u.ToString();

    Session["UserShoppingCartInfo"] = u;
}
```

Within `Session_End()`, you may wish to persist the fields of the `UserShoppingCart` to a database or whatnot. In any case, if you were to launch two or three instances of your browser of choice, you would find that each user is able to build a custom shopping cart that maps to his unique instance of `HttpSessionState`.

Additional Members of HttpSessionState

The `HttpSessionState` class defines a number of other members of interest beyond the type indexer. First, the `SessionID` property will return the current user's unique ID:

```
lblUserID.Text = string.Format("Here is your ID: {0}",
    Session.SessionID);
```

The `Remove()` and `RemoveAll()` methods may be used to clear items out of the user's instance of `HttpSessionState`:

```
Session.Remove["SomeItemWeDontNeedAnymore"];
```

The `HttpSessionState` type also defines a set of members that control the expiration policy of the current session. Again, by default each user has 20 minutes of inactivity before the `HttpSessionState` object is destroyed. Thus, if a user enters your web application (and therefore obtains a unique session ID), but does not return to the site within 20 minutes, the runtime assumes the user is no longer interested and destroys all session data for that user. You are free to change this default 20-minute expiration value on a user-by-user basis using the `Timeout` property. The most common place to do so is within the scope of your `Global.Session_Start()` method:

```
protected void Session_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
{
    // Each user has 5 minutes of inactivity.
    Session.Timeout = 5;
    Session["UserShoppingCartInfo"]
        = new UserShoppingCart();
}
```

■ **Note** If you do not need to tweak each user's `Timeout` value, you are able to alter the 20-minute default for all users via the `Timeout` attribute of the `<sessionState>` element within the `Web.config` file (examined at the end of this chapter).

The benefit of the `Timeout` property is that you have the ability to assign specific timeout values discretely for each user. For example, imagine you have created a web application that allows users to pay cash for a given membership level. You may say that Gold members should time out within one hour, while Wood members should get only 30 seconds. This possibility begs the question, how can you remember user-specific information (such as the current membership level) across web visits? One possible answer is through the user of the `HttpCookie` type. (And speaking of cookies . . .)

■ **Source Code** The SessionState files are included under the Chapter 24 subdirectory.

Understanding Cookies

The final state management technique examined here is the act of persisting data within *cookie*, which is often realized as a text file (or set of files) on the user's machine. When a user logs on to a given site, the browser checks to see if the user's machine has a cookie file for the URL in question and, if so, appends this data to the HTTP request.

The receiving server-side web page could then read the cookie data to create a GUI that may be based on the current user preferences. I am sure you've noticed that when you visit one of your favorite websites, it somehow just knows the sort of content you wish to see. For example, when I log on to `http://www.ministryofsound.com`, I am automatically shown content that reflects my musical tastes. The reason (in part) has to do with a cookie stored on my computer that contains information regarding the type of music I tend to play.

The exact location of your cookie files will depend on which browser you happen to be using. For those using Microsoft Internet Explorer, cookies are stored by default under C:\Documents and Settings\<loggedOnUser>\Cookies (see Figure 24-6).

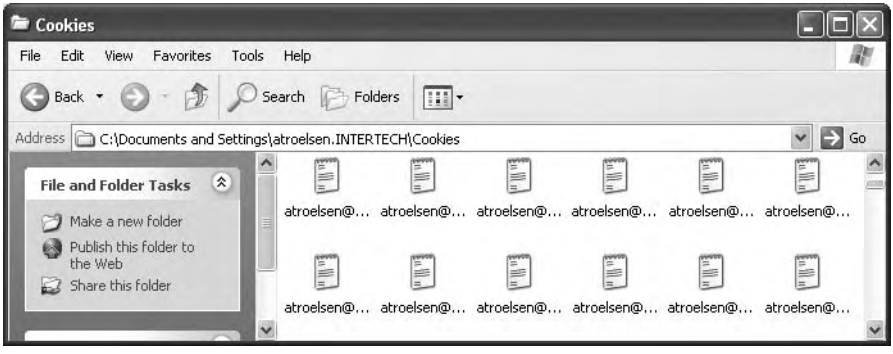


Figure 24-6. *Cookie data as persisted under Microsoft Internet Explorer*

The contents of a given cookie file will obviously vary among URLs, but keep in mind that they are ultimately text files. Thus, cookies are a horrible choice when you wish to maintain sensitive information about the current user (such as a credit card number, password, or whatnot). Even if you take the time to encrypt the data, a crafty hacker could decrypt the value and use it for purely evil pursuits. In any case, cookies do play a role in the development of web applications, so let's check out how ASP.NET handles this particular state management technique.

Creating Cookies

First of all, understand that ASP.NET cookies can be configured to be either persistent or temporary. A *persistent* cookie is typically regarded as the classic definition of cookie data, in that the set of name/value pairs is physically saved to the user's hard drive. *Temporary* cookies (also termed *session cookies*) contain the same data as a persistent cookie, but the name/value pairs are never saved to the user's machine; rather, they exist *only* within the HTTP header. Once the user logs off your site, all data contained within the session cookie is destroyed.

■ **Note** Most browsers support cookies of up to 4,096 bytes. Because of this size limit, cookies are best used to store small amounts of data, such as a user ID that can be used to identify the user and pull details from a database.

The `System.Web.HttpCookie` type is the class that represents the server side of the cookie data (persistent or temporary). When you wish to create a new cookie, you access the `Response.Cookies` property. Once the new `HttpCookie` is inserted into the internal collection, the name/value pairs flow back to the browser within the HTTP header.

To check out cookie behavior firsthand, create a new ASP.NET web application (CookieStateApp) and create the UI displayed in Figure 24-7.

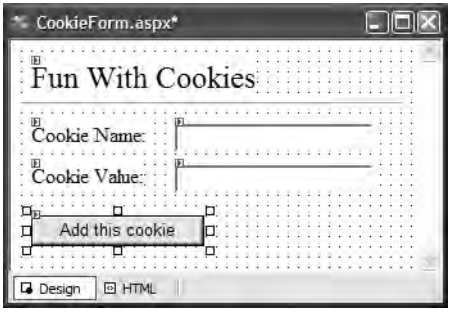


Figure 24-7. *The UI of CookiesStateApp*

Within the `Button`'s `Click` event handler, build a new `HttpCookie` and insert it into the `Cookie` collection exposed from the `HttpRequest.Cookies` property. Be very aware that the data will *not* persist itself to the user's hard drive unless you explicitly set an expiration date using the `HttpCookie.Expires` property. Thus, the following implementation will create a temporary cookie that is destroyed when the user shuts down the browser:

```
protected void btnInsertCookie_Click(object sender, System.EventArgs e)
{
     // Make a new (temp) cookie.
     HttpCookie theCookie =
          new HttpCookie(txtCookieName.Text,
          txtCookieValue.Text);
     Response.Cookies.Add(theCookie);
}
```

However, the following generates a persistent cookie that will expire on March 24, 2009:

```
private void btnInsertCookie_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // Make a new (persistent) cookie.
     HttpCookie theCookie =
          new HttpCookie(txtCookieName.Text,
          txtCookieValue.Text);
     theCookie.Expires = DateTime.Parse("03/24/2009");
     Response.Cookies.Add(theCookie);
}
```

If you were to run this application and insert some cookie data, the browser automatically persists this data to disk. When you open this text file, you will see something similar to Figure 24-8.

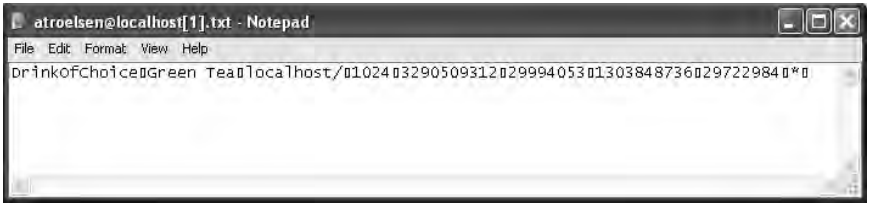


Figure 24-8. *The persistent cookie data*

Reading Incoming Cookie Data

Recall that the browser is the entity in charge of accessing persisted cookies when navigating to a previously visited page. To interact with the incoming cookie data under ASP.NET, access the `HttpRequest.Cookies` property. To illustrate, if you were to update your current UI with the means to obtain current cookie data via a `Button` widget, you could iterate over each name/value pair and present the information within a `Label` widget:

```
protected void btnShowCookies_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     string cookieData = "";
     foreach(string s in Request.Cookies)
     {
          cookieData +=
               string.Format("<li><b>Name</b>: {0}, <b>Value</b>: {1}</li>",
                    s, Request.Cookies[s].Value);
     }
     lblCookieData.Text = cookieData;
}
```

If you now run the application and click your new button, you will find that the cookie data has indeed been sent by your browser (see Figure 24-9).

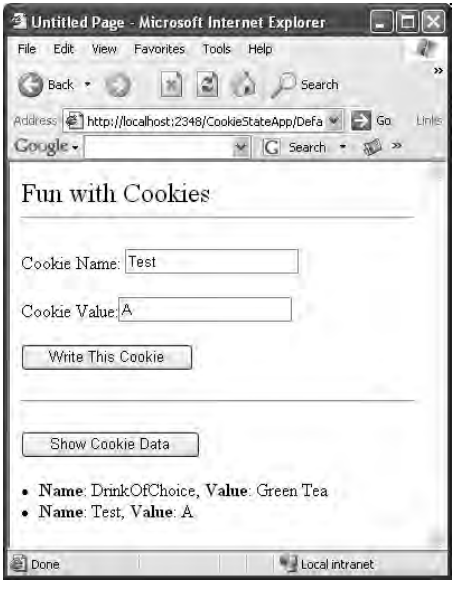


Figure 24-9.

At this point in the chapter, you have examined numerous ways to remember information about your users. As you have seen, view state and application, cache, session, and cookie data are manipulated in more or less the same way (via a class indexer). As you have also seen, the `HttpApplication` type is often used to intercept and respond to events that occur during your web application's lifetime. Next up: the role of the `Web.config` file.

■ **Source Code** The CookieStateApp files are included under the Chapter 24 subdirectory.

Configuring Your ASP.NET Web Application Using Web.config

During your examination of .NET assemblies, you learned that client applications can leverage an XML-based configuration file to instruct the CLR how it should handle binding requests, assembly probing, and other runtime details. The same holds true for ASP.NET web applications, with the notable exception that web-centric configuration files (introduced in Chapter 23) are *always* named `Web.config` (unlike `*.exe` configuration files, which are named based on the related client executable).

When you insert a `Web.config` file to your site using the WebSite ➤ Add New Item menu option, the default structure looks something like the following (comments removed for clarity):

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<configuration xmlns="http://schemas.microsoft.com/.NetConfiguration/v2.0">
    <appSettings/>
    <connectionStrings/>
    <system.web>
        <compilation debug="false"/>
        <authentication mode="Windows"/>
    </system.web>
</configuration>
```

Like any `*.config` file, `Web.config` defines the root-level `<configuration>` element. Nested within the root is the `<system.web>` element, which can contain numerous subelements used to control how your web application should behave at runtime. Under ASP.NET, the `Web.config` file can be modified using any text editor. Table 24-4 outlines some of the subelements that can be found within a `Web.config` file.

■ **Note** Look up the topic "ASP.NET Settings Schema" within the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for full details on the format of `Web.config`.

Table 24-4. *Select Elements of a* `Web.config` *File*

Element	Meaning in Life
`<appSettings>`	This element is used to establish custom name/value pairs that can be programmatically read in memory for use by your pages.
`<authentication>`	This security-related element is used to define the authentication mode for this web application.
`<authorization>`	This is another security-centric element used to define which users can access which resources on the web server.

Element	Meaning in Life
`<compilation>`	This element is used to enable (or disable) debugging and define the default .NET language used by this web application, and it may optionally define the set of external .NET assemblies that should be automatically referenced.
`<connectionStrings>`	This element is used to hold external connection strings used within this website.
`<customErrors>`	This element is used to tell the runtime exactly how to display errors that occur during the functioning of the web application.
`<globalization>`	This element is used to configure the globalization settings for this web application.
`<sessionState>`	This element is used to control how and where session state data will be stored by the .NET runtime.
`<trace>`	This element is used to enable (or disable) tracing support for this web application.

A `Web.config` file may contain additional subelements above and beyond the set presented in Table 24-4. The vast majority of these items are security-related, while the remaining items are useful only during advanced ASP.NET scenarios such as creating with custom HTTP headers or custom HTTP modules (not covered here). If you wish to see the complete set of elements that can appear in a `Web.config` file, look up the topic "ASP.NET Settings Schema" using the online help.

Enabling Tracing via <trace>

The first aspect of the `Web.config` file you'll examine is the `<trace>` subelement. This XML entity may take any number of attributes to further qualify its behavior, as shown in the following skeleton:

```
<trace enabled="true|false"
       localOnly="true|false"
       pageOutput="true|false"
       requestLimit="integer"
       traceMode="SortByTime|SortByCategory"/>
```

Table 24-5 hits the highlights of each attribute.

Table 24-5. *Attributes of the* `<trace>` *Element*

Attribute	Meaning in Life
`Enabled`	Specifies whether tracing is enabled for an application as a whole (the default is false). As you saw in the previous chapter, you can selectively enable tracing for a given `*.aspx` file using the `@Page` directive.
`localOnly`	Indicates that the trace information is viewable only on the host web server and not by remote clients (the default is true).
`pageOutput`	Specifies how trace output should be viewed.
`requestLimit`	Specifies the number of trace requests to store on the server. The default is 10. If the limit is reached, trace is automatically disabled.
`traceMode`	Indicates that trace information is displayed in the order it is processed. The default is `SortByTime`, but it can also be configured to sort by category.

Recall from the previous chapter that individual pages may enable tracing using the `<%@Page%>` directive. However, if you wish to enable tracing for all pages in your web application, simply update `<trace>` as follows:

```
    <trace
        enabled="true"
        requestLimit="10"
        pageOutput="false"
        traceMode="SortByTime"
        localOnly="true"
    />
```

Customizing Error Output via <customErrors>

The <customErrors> element can be used to automatically redirect all errors to a custom set of *.htm files. This can be helpful if you wish to build a more user-friendly error page than the default supplied by the CLR. In its skeletal form, the <customErrors> element looks like the following:

```
<customErrors defaultRedirect="url" mode="On|Off|RemoteOnly">
   <error statusCode="statuscode" redirect="url"/>
</customErrors>
```

To illustrate the usefulness of the <customErrors> element, assume your ASP.NET web application has two *.htm files. The first file (genericError.htm) functions as a catchall error page. Perhaps this page contains an image of your company logo, a link to e-mail the system administrator, and some sort of apologetic verbiage. The second file (Error404.htm) is a custom error page that should only occur when the runtime detects error number 404 (the dreaded "resource not found" error). Now, if you want to ensure that all errors are handled by these custom pages, you can update your Web.config file as follows:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<configuration xmlns="http://schemas.microsoft.com/.NetConfiguration/v2.0">
  <appSettings/>
  <connectionStrings/>
  <system.web>
    <compilation debug="false"/>
    <authentication mode="Windows"/>
    <customErrors defaultRedirect = "genericError.htm" mode="On">
      <error statusCode="404" redirect="Error404.htm"/>
    </customErrors>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

Note how the root <customErrors> element is used to specify the name of the generic page for all unhandled errors. One attribute that may appear in the opening tag is mode. The default setting is RemoteOnly, which instructs the runtime *not* to display custom error pages if the HTTP request came from the same machine as the web server (this is quite helpful for developers, who would like to see the details). When you set the mode attribute to "on," this will cause custom errors to be seen from all machines (including your development box). Also note that the <customErrors> element may support any number of nested <error> elements to specify which page will be used to handle specific error codes.

To test these custom error redirects, build an *.aspx page that defines two Button widgets, and handle their Click events as follows:

```
private void btnGeneralError_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
     // This will trigger a general error.
     throw new Exception("General error...");
}
private void btn404Error_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
{
```

```
    // This will trigger 404 (assuming there is no file named MyPage.aspx!)
    Response.Redirect("MyPage.aspx");
}
```

Options for Storing State via <sessionState>

Far and away the most powerful aspect of a `Web.config` file is the `<sessionState>` element. By default, ASP.NET will store session state using an in-process `*.dll` hosted by the ASP.NET worker process (`aspnet_wp.exe`). Like any `*.dll`, the plus side is that access to the information is as fast as possible. However, the downside is that if this AppDomain crashes (for whatever reason), all of the user's state data is destroyed. Furthermore, when you store state data as an in-process `*.dll`, you cannot interact with a networked web farm. By default, the `<sessionState>` element of your `Web.config` file looks like this:

```
<sessionState
        mode="InProc"
        stateConnectionString="tcpip=127.0.0.1:42424"
        sqlConnectionString="data source=127.0.0.1;Trusted_Connection=yes"
        cookieless="false"
        timeout="20"
/>
```

This default mode of storage works just fine if your web application is hosted by a single web server. However, under ASP.NET, you can instruct the runtime to host the session state `*.dll` in a surrogate process named the ASP.NET session state server (`aspnet_state.exe`). When you do so, you are able to offload the `*.dll` from `aspnet_wp.exe` into a unique `*.exe`. The first step in doing so is to start the `aspnet_state.exe` Windows service. To do so at the command line, simply type

```
net start aspnet_state
```

Alternatively, you can start `aspnet_state.exe` using the Services applet accessed from the Administrative Tools folder of the Control Panel (see Figure 24-10).

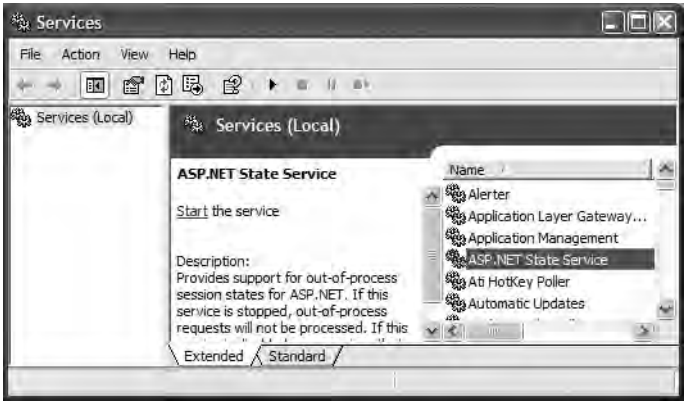


Figure 24-10. *The Services applet*

The key benefit of this approach is that you can configure `aspnet_state.exe` to start automatically when the machine boots up using the Properties window. In any case, once the session state server is running, alter the `<sessionState>` element of your `Web.config` file as follows:

```
<sessionState
        mode="StateServer"
        stateConnectionString="tcpip=127.0.0.1:42424"
        sqlConnectionString="data source=127.0.0.1;Trusted_Connection=yes"
        cookieless="false"
        timeout="20"
/>
```

Here, the `mode` attribute has been set to `StateServer`. That's it! At this point, the CLR will host session-centric data within `aspnet_state.exe`. In this way, if the AppDomain hosting the web application crashes, the session data is preserved. Also notice that the `<sessionState>` element can also support a `stateConnectionString` attribute. The default TCP/IP address value (127.0.0.1) points to the local machine. If you would rather have the .NET runtime use the `aspnet_state.exe` service located on another networked machine (again, think web farms), you are free to update this value.

Finally, if you require the highest degree of isolation and durability for your web application, you may choose to have the runtime store all your session state data within Microsoft SQL Server. The appropriate update to the `Web.config` file is simple:

```
<sessionState
        mode="SQLServer"
        stateConnectionString="tcpip=127.0.0.1:42424"
        sqlConnectionString="data source=127.0.0.1;Trusted_Connection=yes"
        cookieless="false"
        timeout="20"
/>
```

However, before you attempt to run the associated web application, you need to ensure that the target machine (specified by the `sqlConnectionString` attribute) has been properly configured. When you install the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK (or Visual Studio 2005), you will be provided with two files named `InstallSqlState.sql` and `UninstallSqlState.sql`, located by default under <%windir%>\Microsoft.NET\Framework\<version>. On the target machine, you must run the `InstallSqlState.sql` file using a tool such as the SQL Server Query Analyzer (which ships with Microsoft SQL Server).

Once this SQL script has executed, you will find a new SQL Server database has been created (ASPState) and that contains a number of stored procedures called by the ASP.NET runtime and a set of tables used to store the session data itself (also, the tempdb database has been updated with a set of tables for swapping purposes). As you would guess, configuring your web application to store session data within SQL Server is the slowest of all possible options. The benefit is that user data is as durable as possible (even if the web server is rebooted).

■ **Note** If you make use of the ASP.NET session state server or SQL Server to store your session data, you must make sure that any custom types placed in the `HttpSessionState` object have been marked with the `[Serializable]` attribute.

The ASP.NET 2.0 Site Administration Utility

To finish up this section of the chapter, I'd like to mention the fact that ASP.NET 2.0 now provides a web-based configuration utility that will manage many settings within your site's `Web.config` file. To activate this utility (see Figure 24-11), select the WebSite ➤ ASP.NET Configuration menu option of Visual Studio 2005.

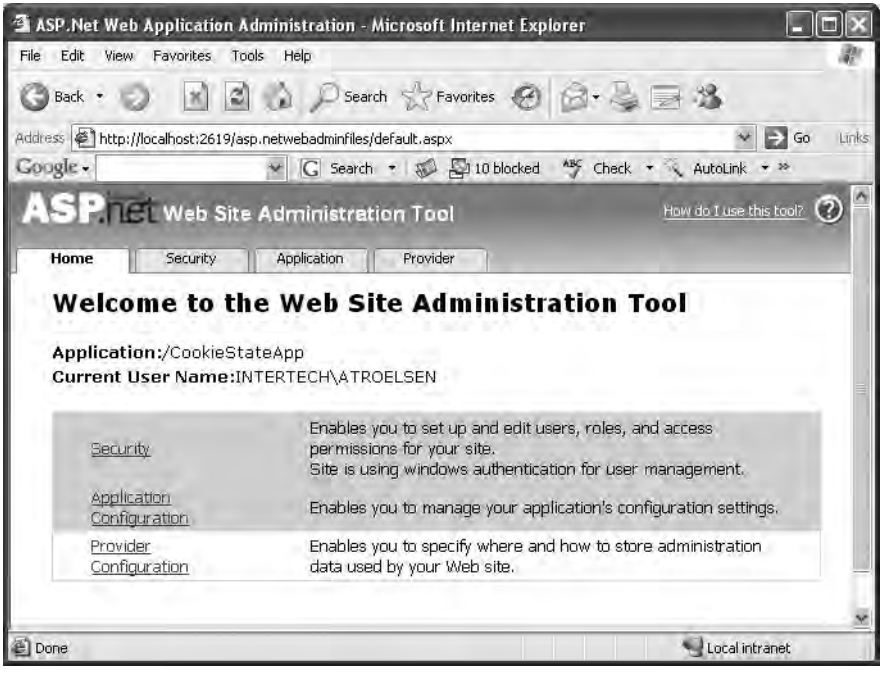

ASP.Net Web Application Administration - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://localhost:2619/asp.netwebadminfiles/default.aspx
Go Links
Google Search 10 blocked Check AutoLink
ASP.net Web Site Administration Tool
How do I use this tool?
Home Security Application Provider
Welcome to the Web Site Administration Tool
Application:/CookieStateApp
Current User Name:INTERTECH\ATROELSEN
Security
Enables you to set up and edit users, roles, and access permissions for your site.
Site is using windows authentication for user management.
Application Configuration
Enables you to manage your application's configuration settings.
Provider Configuration
Enables you to specify where and how to store administration data used by your Web site.
Done
Local intranet

Figure 24-11. *The ASP.NET 2.0 site administration utility*

Most of this tool's functionality is used to establish security-centric details of your site (authentication mode, user roles, security providers, etc.). In addition, however, this tool allows you to establish application settings, debugging details, and error pages.

Configuration Inheritance

Last but not least is *configuration inheritance*. As you learned in the previous chapter, a web application can be defined as the set of all files contained within a root directory *and any optional subdirectories*. All the example applications in this and the previous chapter have existed on a single root directory managed by IIS (with the optional Bin folder). However, large-scale web applications tend to define numerous subdirectories off the root, each of which contains some set of related files. Like a traditional desktop application, this is typically done for the benefit of us mere humans, as a hierarchal structure can make a massive set of files more understandable.

When you have an ASP.NET web application that consists of optional subdirectories off the root, you may be surprised to discover that *each* subdirectory may have its own `Web.config` file! By doing so, you allow each subdirectory to override the settings of a parent directory. If the subdirectory in question does not supply a custom `Web.config` file, it will inherit the settings of the next available `Web.config` file up the directory structure. Thus, as bizarre as it sounds, it is possible to inject an OO look and feel to a raw directory structure. Figure 24-12 illustrates the concept.

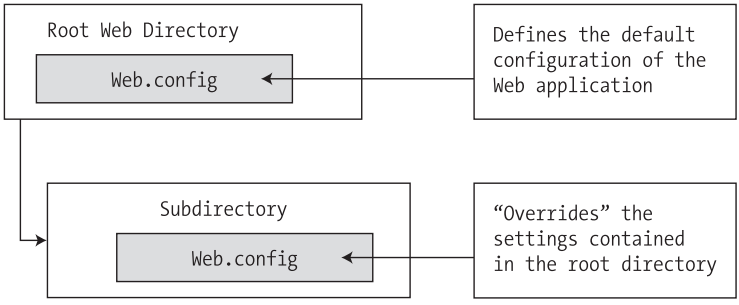


Figure 24-12. *Configuration inheritance*

Of course, although ASP.NET does allow you to define numerous `Web.config` files for a single web application, you are not required to do so. In a great many cases, your web applications function just fine using nothing else than the `Web.config` file located in the root directory of the IIS virtual directory.

■ **Note** Recall from Chapter 11 that the `machine.config` file defines numerous machine-wide settings, many of which are ASP.NET-centric. This file is the ultimate parent in the configuration inheritance hierarchy.

That wraps up our examination of ASP.NET. As mentioned in Chapter 23, complete and total coverage of ASP.NET 2.0 would require an entire book on its own. In any case, I do hope you feel comfortable with the basics of the programming model.

■ **Note** If you require an advanced treatment of ASP.NET 2.0, check out *Expert ASP.NET 2.0 Advanced Application Development* by Dominic Selly et al. (Apress, 2005).

To wrap up our voyage, the final chapter examines the topic of building XML web services under .NET 2.0.

Summary

In this chapter, you rounded out your knowledge of ASP.NET by examining how to leverage the `HttpApplication` type. As you have seen, this type provides a number of default event handlers that allow you to intercept various application- and session-level events.

The bulk of this chapter was spent examining a number of state management techniques. Recall that view state is used to automatically repopulate the values of HTML widgets between postbacks to a specific page. Next, you checked out the distinction of application- and session-level data, cookie management, and the ASP.NET application cache. Finally, you examined a number of elements that may be contained in the `Web.config` file.

CHAPTER 25

Understanding XML Web Services

Chapter 18 introduced you to the .NET remoting layer. As you have seen, this technology allows any number of .NET-savvy computers to exchange information across machine boundaries. While this is all well and good, one possible limitation of the .NET remoting layer is the fact that each machine involved in the exchange must have the .NET Framework installed, must understand the CTS, and must speak the same wire format (such as TCP).

XML web services offer a more flexible alternative to distributed application development. Simply put, an *XML web service* is a unit of code hosted by a web server that can be accessed using industry standards such as HTTP and XML. As you would guess, using neutral technologies, XML web services offer an unprecedented level of operating system, platform, and language interoperability.

In this final chapter, you will learn how to build XML web services using the .NET platform. Along the way, you will examine a number of related topics, such as discovery services (UDDI and DISCO), the Web Service Description Language (WSDL), and the Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP). Once you understand how to build an XML web service, you will examine various approaches to generate client-side proxies that are capable of invoking "web methods" in a synchronous and asynchronous fashion.

The Role of XML Web Services

From the highest level, you can define an XML web service as a unit of code that can be invoked via HTTP requests. Unlike a traditional web application, however, XML web services are not (necessarily) used to emit HTML back to a browser for display purposes. Rather, an XML web service often exposes the same sort of functionality found in a standard .NET code library (e.g., crunch some numbers, fetch a `DataSet`, return stock quotes, etc.).

Benefits of XML Web Services

At first glance, an XML web services may seem to be little more than just another remoting technology. While this is true, there is more to the story. Historically speaking, accessing remote objects required platform-specific (and often language-specific) protocols (DCOM, Java RMI, etc.). The problem with this approach is not the underlying technology, but the fact that each is locked into a specific (often proprietary) wire format. Thus, if you are attempting to build a distributed system that involves numerous operating systems, each machine must agree upon the packet format, transmission protocol, and so forth. To simplify matters, XML web services allow you to invoke methods and properties of a remote object using standard HTTP requests. To be sure, of all the protocols in existence today, HTTP is the one specific wire protocol that all platforms can agree on (after all, HTTP is the backbone of the World Wide Web).

Another fundamental problem with proprietary remoting architectures is that they require the sender and receiver to understand the same underlying type system. However, as I am sure you can agree, a Java `arrayList` has little to do with a .NET `ArrayList`, which has nothing to do with a C++ array. XML web services provide a way for unrelated platforms, operating systems, and programming languages to exchange information in harmony. Rather than forcing the caller to understand a specific type system, information is passed between systems via XML data representation (which is little more than a well-formatted string). The short answer is, if your operating system can go online and parse character data, it can interact with an XML web service.

■ **Note** A production-level Microsoft .NET XML web service is hosted under IIS using a unique virtual directory. As explained in Chapter 23, however, as of .NET 2.0 it is now possible to load web content from a local directory (for development and testing purposes) using `WebDev.WebServer.exe`.

Defining an XML Web Service Client

One aspect of XML web services that might not be readily understood from the onset is the fact that an XML web service consumer is not limited to a web page. Console-based and Windows Forms–based clients can use a web service just as easily. In each case, the XML web service consumer indirectly interacts with the distant XML web service through an intervening proxy type.

An XML web service proxy looks and feels like the actual remote object and exposes the same set of members. Under the hood, however, the proxy's implementation code forwards requests to the XML web service using standard HTTP. The proxy also maps the incoming stream of XML back into .NET-specific data types (or whatever type system is required by the consumer application). Figure 25-1 illustrates the fundamental nature of XML web services.

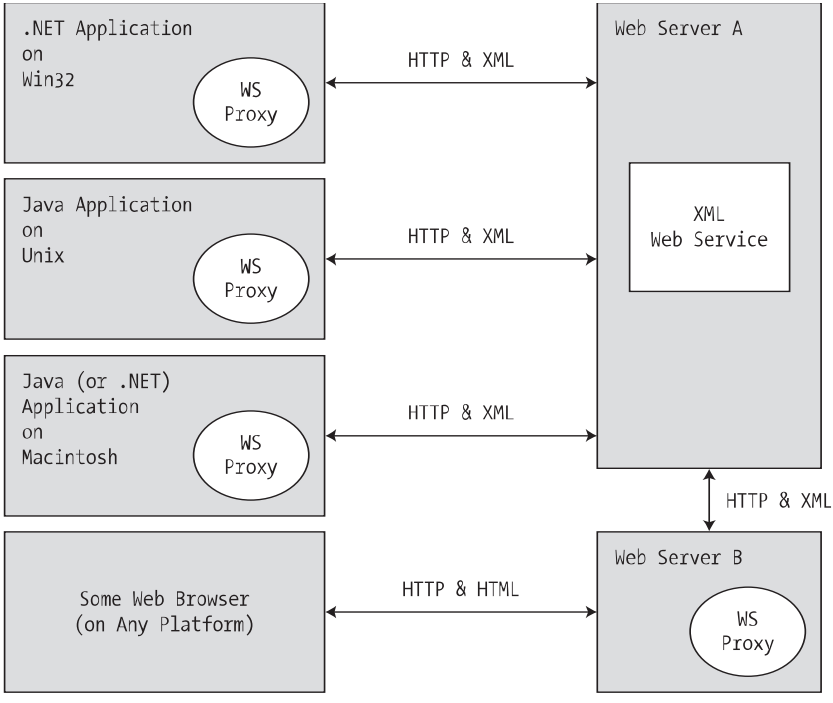


Figure 25-1. *XML web services in action*

The Building Blocks of an XML Web Service

In addition to the managed code library that constitutes the exposed functionality, an XML web service requires some supporting infrastructure. Specifically, an XML web service involves the following core technologies:

- A discovery service (so clients can resolve the location of the XML web service)
- A description service (so clients know what the XML web service can do)
- A transport protocol (to pass the information between the client and the XML web service)

We'll examine details behind each piece of infrastructure throughout this chapter. However, to get into the proper frame of mind, here is a brief overview of each supporting technology.

Previewing XML Web Service Discovery

Before a client can invoke the functionality of a web service, it must first know of its existence and location. Now, if you are the individual (or company) who is building the client and XML web service, the discovery phase is quite simple given that you already know the location of the web service in question. However, what if you wish to share the functionality of your web service with the world at large?

To do this, you have the option of registering your XML web service with a Universal Description, Discovery, and Integration (UDDI) server. Clients may submit request to a UDDI catalog to find a list of all web services that match some search criteria (e.g., "Find me all web services having to do real time weather updates"). Once you have identified a specific web server from the list returned via the UDDI query, you are then able to investigate its overall functionality. If you like, consider UDDI to be the white pages for XML web services.

In addition to UDDI discovery, an XML web service built using .NET can be located using DISCO, which is a somewhat forced acronym standing for *Discovery of Web Services*. Using static discovery (via a `*.disco` file) or dynamic discovery (via a `*.vsdisco` file), you are able to advertise the set of XML web services that are located at a specific URL. Potential web service clients can navigate to a web server's `*.disco` file to see links to all the published XML web services.

Understand, however, that dynamic discovery is disabled by default, given the potential security risk of allowing IIS to expose the set of all XML web services to any interested individual. Given this, I will not comment on DISCO services for the remainder of this text.

■ **Note** If you wish to activate dynamic discovery support for a given web server, look up the Microsoft Knowledge Base article Q307303 on `http://support.microsoft.com`.

Previewing XML Web Service Description

Once a client knows the location of a given XML web service, the client in question must fully understand the exposed functionality. For example, the client must know that there is a method named `GetWeatherReport()` that takes some set of parameters and sends back a given return value before the client can invoke the method. As you may be thinking, this is a job for a platform-, language-, and operating system–neutral metalanguage. Specifically speaking, the XML-based metadata used to describe a XML web service is termed the *Web Service Description Language* (*WSDL*).

In a good number of cases, the WSDL description of an XML web service will be automatically generated by Microsoft IIS when the incoming request has a `?wsdl` suffix. As you will see, the primary consumers of WSDL contracts are proxy generation tools. For example, the `wsdl.exe` command-line utility (explained in detail later in this chapter) will generate a client-side C# proxy class from a WSDL document.

For more complex cases (typically for the purposes of interoperability), many developers take a "WSDL first" approach and begin building their web services by defining the WSDL document manually. As luck would have it, the `wsdl.exe` command-line tool is also able to generate interface descriptions for an XML web service based on a WSDL definition.

Previewing the Transport Protocol

Once the client has created a proxy type to communicate with the XML web service, it is able to invoke the exposed web methods. As mentioned, HTTP is the wire protocol that transmits this data. Specifically, however, you can use HTTP `GET`, HTTP `POST`, or SOAP to move information between consumers and web services.

By and large, SOAP will be your first choice, for as you will see, SOAP messages can contain XML descriptions of complex types (including your custom types as well as types within the .NET base class libraries). On the other hand, if you make use of the HTTP `GET` or HTTP `POST` protocols, you are restricted to a more limited set of core data XML schema types.

The .NET XML Web Service Namespaces

Now that you have a basic understanding of XML web services, we can get down to the business of building such a creature using the .NET platform. As you would imagine, the base class libraries define a number of namespaces that allow you to interact with each web service technology (see Table 25-1).

Table 25-1. *XML Web Service–centric Namespaces*

Namespace	Meaning in Life
`System.Web.Services`	This namespace contains the core types needed to build an XML web service (including the all-important `[WebMethod]` attribute).
`System.Web.Services.Configuration`	These types allow you configure the runtime behavior of an ASP.NET XML web service.
`System.Web.Services.Description`	These types allow you to programmatically interact with the WSDL document that describes a given web service.
`System.Web.Services.Discovery`	These types allow a web consumer to programmatically discover the web services installed on a given machine.
`System.Web.Services.Protocols`	This namespace defines a number of types that represent the atoms of the various XML web service wire protocols (HTTP `GET`, HTTP `POST`, and SOAP).

■ **Note** All XML web service–centric namespaces are contained within the `System.Web.Services.dll` assembly.

Examining the System.Web.Services Namespace

Despite the rich functionality provided by the .NET XML web service namespaces, the vast majority of your applications will only require you to directly interact with the types defined in `System.Web.Services`. As you can see from Table 25-2, the number of types is quite small (which is a good thing).

Table 25-2. *Members of the* `System.Web.Services` *Namespace*

Type	Meaning in Life
`WebMethodAttribute`	Adding the `[WebMethod]` attribute to a method or property in a web service class type marks the member as invokable via HTTP and serializable as XML.
`WebService`	This is an optional base class for XML web services built using .NET. If you choose to derive from this base type, your XML web service will have the ability to retain stateful information (e.g., session and application variables).
`WebServiceAttribute`	The `[WebService]` attribute may be used to add information to a web service, such as a string describing its functionality and underlying XML namespace.
`WebServiceBindingAttribute`	This attribute (new .NET 2.0) declares the binding protocol a given web service method is implementing (HTTP `GET`, HTTP `POST`, or SOAP) and advertises the level of web services interoperability (WSI) conformity.
`WsiProfiles`	This enumeration (new to .NET 2.0) is used to describe the web services interoperability (WSI) specification to which a web service claims to conform.

The remaining namespaces shown in Table 25-1 are typically only of direct interest to you if you are interested in manually interacting with a WSDL document, discovery services, or the underlying wire protocols. Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for further details.

Building an XML Web Service by Hand

Like any .NET application, XML web services can be developed manually, without the use of an IDE such as Visual Studio 2005. In an effort to demystify XML web services, let's build a simple XML web service by hand. Using your text editor of choice, create a new file named `HelloWorldWebService.asmx` (by convention, `*.asmx` is the extension used to mark .NET web service files). Save it to a convenient location on your hard drive (e.g., C:\HelloWebService) and enter the following type definition:

```
<%@ WebService Language="C#" Class="HelloWebService.HelloService" %>
using System;
using System.Web.Services;

namespace HelloWebService
{
    public class HelloService
    {
        [WebMethod]
        public string HelloWorld()
        {
            return "Hello!";
        }
    }
}
```

For the most part, this `*.asmx` file looks like any other C# namespace definition. The first noticeable difference is the use of the `<%@WebService%>` directive, which at minimum must specify the name of the managed language used to build the contained class definition and the fully qualified

name of the class. In addition to the `Language` and `Class` attributes, the `<%@WebService%>` directive may also take a `Debug` attribute (to inform the ASP.NET compiler to emit debugging symbols) and an optional `CodeBehind` value that identifies the associated code file within the optional App_Code directory (see Chapter 23). In this example, you have avoided the use of a code-behind file and embedded all required logic directly within a single `*.asmx` file.

Beyond the use of the `<%@WebService%>` directive, the only other distinguishing characteristic of this `*.asmx` file is the use of the `[WebMethod]` attribute, which informs the ASP.NET runtime that this method is reachable via incoming HTTP requests and should serialize any return value as XML.

■ **Note** Only members that are adorned with `[WebMethod]` are reachable by HTTP. Members not marked with the `[WebMethod]` attribute cannot be called by the client-side proxy.

Testing Your XML Web Service Using WebDev.WebServer.exe

Recall (again, from Chapter 23) that `WebDev.WebServer.exe` is a development ASP.NET web server that ships with the .NET platform 2.0 SDK. While `WebDev.WebServer.exe` would never be used to host a production-level XML web service, this tool does allow you to run web content directly from a local directory. To test your service using this tool, open a Visual Studio 2005 command prompt and specify an unused port number and physical path to the directory containing your `*.asmx` file:

```
WebDev.WebServer /port:4000 /path:"C:\HelloWebService"
```

Once the web server has started, open your browser of choice and specify the name of your `*.asmx` file exposed from the specified port:

```
http://localhost:4000/HelloWorldWebService.asmx
```

At this point, you are presented with a list of all web methods exposed from this URL (see Figure 25-2).


HelloService Web Service - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://localhost:4000/HelloWorldWebService.asmx
Go Links
Google Search 10 blocked
HelloService
The following operations are supported. For a formal definition, please review the Service Description.
HelloWorld
Local intranet

Figure 25-2. *Testing the XML web service*

If you click the HelloWorld link, you will be passed to another page that allows you to invoke the `[WebMethod]` you just selected. Once you invoke `HelloWorld()`, you will be returned not a literal .NET-centric `System.String`, but rather the XML data representation of the textual data returned from the `HelloWorld()` web method:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?>
<string xmlns="http://tempuri.org/">Hello!</string>
```

Testing Your Web Service Using IIS

Now that you have tested your XML web service using `WebDev.WebServer.exe`, you'll transfer your `*.asmx` file into an IIS virtual directory. Using the information presented in Chapter 23, create a new virtual directory named HelloWS that maps to the physical folder containing the `HelloWorldWebService.asmx` file. Once you do, you are able to test your web service by entering the following URL in your web browser:

```
http://localhost/HelloWS/HelloWorldWebService.asmx
```

Viewing the WSDL Contract

As mentioned, WSDL is a metalanguage that describes numerous characteristics of the web methods at a particular URL. Notice that when you test an XML web service, the autogenerated test page supplies a link named "Service Description." Clicking this link will append the token `?wsdl` to the current request. When the ASP.NET runtime receives a request for an `*.asmx` file tagged with this suffix, it will automatically return the underlying WSDL that describes each web method.

At this point, don't be alarmed with the verbose nature of WSDL or concern yourself with the format of a WSDL document. For the time being, just understand that WSDL describes how web methods can be invoked using each of the current XML web service wire protocols.

The Autogenerated Test Page

As you have just witnessed, XML web services can be tested within a web browser using an autogenerated HTML page. When an HTTP request comes in that maps to a given `*.asmx` file, the ASP.NET runtime makes use of a file named `DefaultWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx` to create an HTML display that allows you to invoke the web methods at a given URL. You can find this `*.aspx` file under the following directory (substitute `<version>` with your current version of the .NET Framework, of course):

```
C:\Windows\Microsoft.NET\Framework\<version>\CONFIG
```

Providing a Custom Test Page

If you wish to instruct the ASP.NET runtime to make use of a custom `*.aspx` file for the purposes of testing your XML web services, you are free to customize this page with additional information (add your company logo, additional descriptions of the service, links to a help document, etc.). To simplify matters, most developers copy the existing `DefaultWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx` to their current project as a starting point and modify the original HTML and C# code.

As a simple test, copy the `DefaultWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx` file into the directory containing `HelloWorldWebService.asmx` (e.g., C:\HelloWebService). Rename this copy to `MyCustomWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx` and update the some aspect of the HTML, such as the `<title>` tag. For example, change the following existing markup:

```
<title><%#ServiceName + " " + GetLocalizedText("WebService")%></title>
```

to the following:

```
<title>My Rocking <%#ServiceName + " " + GetLocalizedText("WebService")%></title>
```

Once you have modified the HTML content, create a `Web.config` file and save it to your current directory. The following XML elements instruct the runtime to make use of your custom `*.aspx` file, rather than `DefaultWsdlhelpGenerator.aspx`:

```
<!--  Here you are specifying a custom *.aspx file -->
<configuration>
  <system.web>
    <webServices>
      <wsdlHelpGenerator href="MyCustomWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx" />
    </webServices>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

When you request your web service, you should see that the browser's title has been updated with your custom content. On a related note, if you wish to disable help page generation for a given web service, you can do so using the following `<remove>` element within the `Web.config` file:

```
<!--  Disable help page generation -->
<configuration>
  <system.web>
    <webServices>
      <protocols>
        <!-- This element also disables WSDL generation -->
        <remove name="Documentation"/>
      </protocols>
    </webServices>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

■ **Source Code** The HelloWorldWebService files are included under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

Building an XML Web Service Using Visual Studio 2005

Now that you have created an XML web service by hand, let's see how Visual Studio 2005 helps get you up and running. Using the File ➤ New ➤ Web Site menu option, create a new C# XML web service project named MagicEightBallWebService and save it to your local file system (see Figure 25-3).

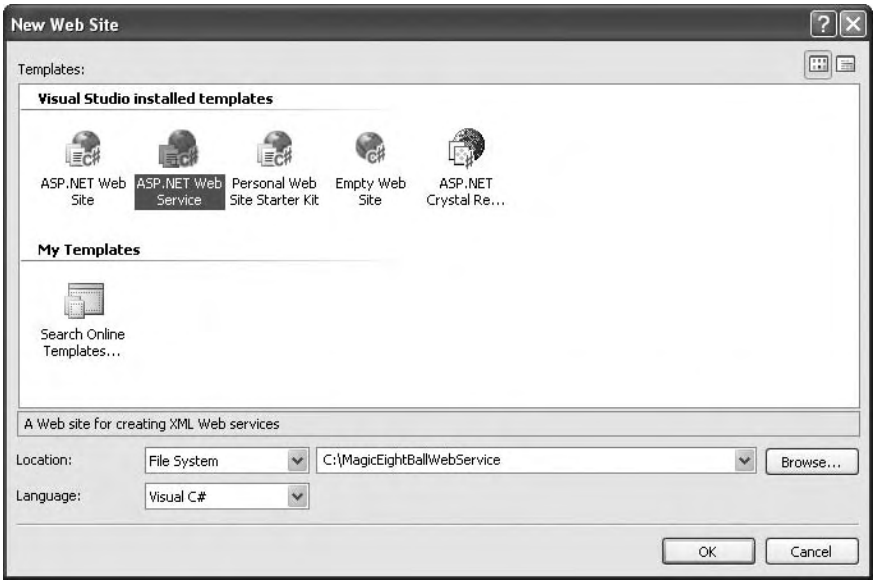


Figure 25-3. *Visual Studio 2005 XML Web Service project*

■ **Note** Like an ASP.NET website, XML web service projects created with Visual Studio 2005 place the `*.sln` file under My Documents\Visual Studio 2005\Projects.

Once you click the OK button, Visual Studio 2005 responds by generating a `Service.asmx` file that defines the following `<%@WebService%>` directive:

```
<%@ WebService Language="C#"
CodeBehind="~/App_Code/Service.cs" Class="Service" %>
```

Note that the `CodeBehind` attribute is used to specify the name of the C# code file (placed by default in your project's App_Code directory) that defines the related class type. By default, `Service.cs` is defined as so:

```
using System;
using System.Web;
using System.Web.Services;
using System.Web.Services.Protocols;

[WebService(Namespace = "http://tempuri.org/")]
[WebServiceBinding(ConformsTo = WsiProfiles.BasicProfile1_1)]
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{
    public Service () {
    }

    [WebMethod]
    public string HelloWorld() {
        return "Hello World";
    }
}
```

Unlike the previous HelloWorldWebService example, notice that the `Service` class now derives from the `System.Web.Services.WebService` base class. You'll examine the members defined by this type in just a moment, but know for now that deriving from this base class is entirely optional.

Also notice that the `Service` class is adorned with two (also optional) attributes named `[WebService]` and `[WebServiceBinding]`. Again, you'll examine the role of these attributes a bit later in this chapter.

Implementing the TellFortune() Web Method

Your MagicEightBall XML web service will mimic the classic fortune-telling toy. To do so, add the following new method to your `Service` class (feel free to delete the existing `HelloWorld()` web method):

```
[WebMethod]
public string TellFortune(string userQuestion)
{
    string[] answers =  { "Future Uncertain", "Yes", "No",
        "Hazy", "Ask again later", "Definitely" };

    // Return a random response to the question.
    Random r = new Random();
    return string.Format("{0}? {1}",
        userQuestion, answers[r.Next(answers.Length)]);
}
```

To test your new XML web service, simply run (or debug) the project using Visual Studio 2005. Given that the `TellFortune()` method requires a single input parameter, the autogenerated HTML test page provides the required input field (see Figure 25-4).

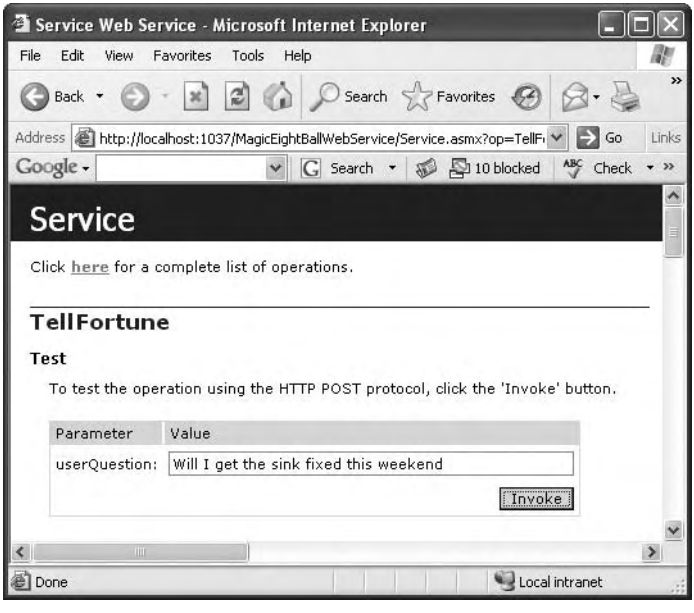

Service Web Service - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://localhost:1037/MagicEightBallWebService/Service.asmx?op=TellF
Go Links
Google Search 10 blocked Check
Service
Click here for a complete list of operations.
TellFortune
Test
To test the operation using the HTTP POST protocol, click the 'Invoke' button.
Parameter Value
userQuestion: Will I get the sink fixed this weekend
Invoke
Done
Local intranet

Figure 25-4. *Invoking the* `TellFortune()` *web method*

Here is a possible response to the question "Will I get the sink fixed this weekend":

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?>
<string xmlns="http://tempuri.org/">
Will I get the sink fixed this weekend? Hazy
</string>
```

So, at this point you have created two simple XML web services: one by hand and the other using Visual Studio 2005. Now that you know the basics, we can dig into the specifics, beginning with the role of the `WebService` base class.

■ **Source Code** The MagicEightBallWebService files are included under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

The Role of the WebService Base Class

As you saw during the development of the HelloWorldWebService service, a web service can derive directly from `System.Object`. However, by default, web services developed using Visual Studio 2005 automatically derive from the `System.Web.Service.WebService` base class. Table 25-3 documents the core members of this class type.

Table 25-3. *Key Members of the* `System.Web.Services.WebService` *Type*

Property	Meaning in Life
`Application`	Provides access to the `HttpApplicationState` object for the current HTTP request
`Context`	Provides access to the `HttpContext` type that encapsulates all HTTP-specific context used by the HTTP server to process web requests
`Server`	Provides access to the `HttpServerUtility` object for the current request
`Session`	Provides access to the `HttpSessionState` type for the current request
`SoapVersion`	Retrieves the version of the SOAP protocol used to make the SOAP request to the XML web service; new to .NET 2.0

As you may be able to gather, if you wish to build a *stateful* web service using application and session variables (see Chapter 24), you are required to derive from `WebService`, given that this type defines the `Application` and `Session` properties. On the other hand, if you are building an XML web service that does not require the ability to "remember" information about the external users, extending `WebService` is not required. We will revisit the process of building stateful XML web services during our examination of the `EnableSession` property of the `[WebMethod]` attribute.

Understanding the [WebService] Attribute

An XML web service class may optionally be qualified using the `[WebService]` attribute (not to be confused with the `WebService` base class). This attribute supports a few named properties, the first of which is `Namespace`. This property can be used to establish the name of the XML namespace to use within the WSDL document.

As you may already know, XML namespaces are used to scope custom XML elements within a specific group (just like .NET namespaces). By default, the ASP.NET runtime will assign a dummy XML namespace of `http://tempuri.org` for a given `*.asmx` file. As well, Visual Studio 2005 assigns the `Namespace` value to `http://tempuri.org` by default.

Assume you have created a new XML web service project with Visual Studio 2005 named CalculatorService that defines the following two web methods, named `Add()` and `Subtract()`:

```
[WebService(Namespace = "http://tempuri.org/")]
[WebServiceBinding(ConformsTo = WsiProfiles.BasicProfile1_1)]
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{
    [WebMethod]
    public int Subtract(int x, int y) { return x - y; }

    [WebMethod]
    public int Add(int x, int y) { return x + y; }
}
```

Before you publish your XML web service to the world at large, you should supply a proper namespace that reflects the point of origin, which is typically the URL of the site hosting the XML web service. In the following code update, note that the `[WebService]` attribute also allows you to set a named property termed `Description` that describes the overall nature of your web service:

```
[WebService(Description = "The Amazing Calculator Web Service",
    Namespace ="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/")]
[WebServiceBinding(ConformsTo = WsiProfiles.BasicProfile1_1)]
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{ ... }
```

The Effect of the Namespace and Description Properties

If you run the project, you will find that the warning to replace `http://tempuri.org` is no longer displayed in the autogenerated test page. Furthermore, if you click the Service Description link to view the underlying WSDL, you will find that the `TargetNamespace` attribute has now been updated with your custom XML namespace. Finally, the WSDL file now contains a `<documentation>` element that is based on your `Description` value:

```
<wsdl:documentation xmlns:wsdl="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/">
    The Amazing Calculator Web Service
</wsdl:documentation>
```

As you might guess, it would be completely possible to build a custom utility that reads the value contained within the `<documentation>` element (e.g., an XML web service–centric object browser). In most cases, however, this value will be used by `DefaultWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx`.

The Name Property

The final property of the `WebServiceAttribute` type is `Name`, which is used to establish the name of the XML web service exposed to the outside world. By default, the external name of a web service is identical to the name of the class type itself (`Service` by default). However, if you wish to decouple the .NET class name from the underlying WSDL name, you can update the `[WebService]` attribute as follows:

```
[WebService(Description = "The Amazing Calculator Web Service",
    Namespace ="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/",
    Name = "CalculatorWebService")]
[WebServiceBinding(ConformsTo = WsiProfiles.BasicProfile1_1)]
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{ ... }
```

Figure 25-5 shows the test page generated by `DefaultWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx` based on the `[WebService]` attribute.

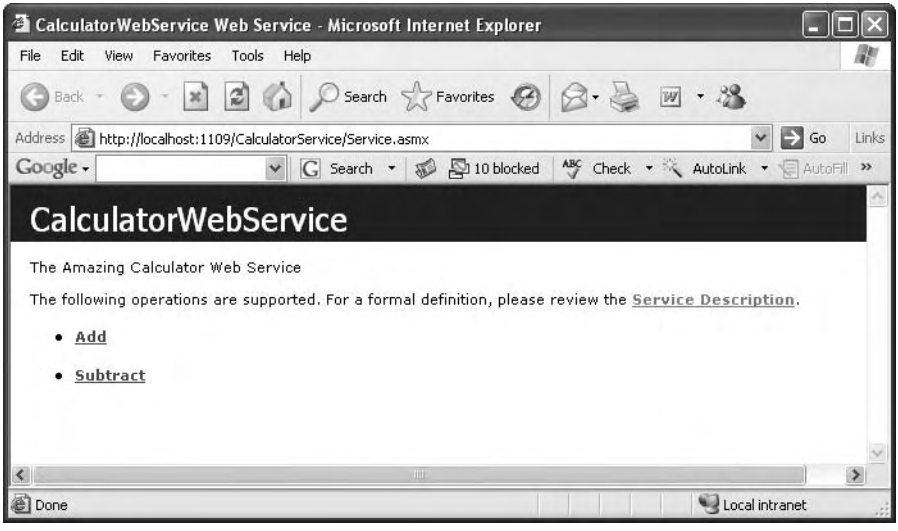

CalculatorWebService Web Service - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://localhost:1109/CalculatorService/Service.asmx
Go Links
Google Search 10 blocked Check AutoLink AutoFill
CalculatorWebService
The Amazing Calculator Web Service
The following operations are supported. For a formal definition, please review the Service Description.
Add
Subtract
Done
Local intranet

Figure 25-5. *The CalculatorWebService*

Understanding the [WebServiceBinding] Attribute

As of .NET 2.0, an XML web service can be attributed with `[WebServiceBinding]`. Among other things, this new attribute is used to specify if the XML web service conforms to "Web services interoperability (WSI) basic profile 1.1". So, what exactly does that mean? Well, if you have been actively working with XML web services, you may know firsthand that one of the frustrating aspects of this technology is that early on, WSDL was an evolving specification. Given this fact, it was not uncommon for the same WSDL element (or attribute) to be interpreted in different manners across development tools (IIS, WSAD), web servers (IIS, Apache), and architectures (.NET, J2EE).

Clearly this is problematic for an XML web service, as one of the motivating factors is to simplify the way in which information can be processed in a multiplatform, multi-architecture, and multi-language universe. To rectify the problem, the WSI initiative offers a nonproprietary web services specification to promote the interoperability of web services across platforms. Under .NET 2.0, the `ConformsTo` property of `[WebServiceBinding]` can be set to any value of the `WsiProfiles` enumeration:

```
public enum WsiProfiles
{
    // The web service makes no conformance claims.
    None,
    // The web service claims to conform to the
    // WSI Basic Profile version 1.1.
    BasicProfile1_1
}
```

By default, XML web services generated using Visual Studio 2005 are assumed to conform to the WSI basic profile 1.1. Of course, simply setting the `ConformsTo` named property to `WsiProfiles.BasicProfile1_1` does not guarantee each web method is truly compliant. For example, one rule of BP 1.1 states that every method in a WSDL document must have a unique name (overloading of exposed web methods is not permitted under BP 1.1). The good news is that the ASP.NET runtime is able to determine various BP 1.1 validations and will report the issue at runtime.

Ignoring BP 1.1 Conformance Verification

As of .NET 2.0, XML web services are automatically checked against the WSI basic profile (BP) 1.1. In most cases, this is a good thing, given that you are able to build software that has the greatest reach as possible. In some cases, however, you may wish to ignore BP 1.1 conformance (e.g., if you are building in-house XML web services where interoperability is not much of an issue). To instruct the runtime to ignore BP 1.1 violations, set the `ConformsTo` property to `WsiProfiles.None` and the `EmitConformanceClaims` property to false:

```
[WebService(Description = "The Amazing Calculator Web Service",
    Namespace ="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/",
    Name = "CalculatorWebService")]
[WebServiceBinding(ConformsTo = WsiProfiles.None ,
    EmitConformanceClaims = false)]
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{...}
```

As you might suspect, the value assigned to `EmitConformanceClaims` controls whether the conformance claims expressed by the `ConformsTo` property are provided when a WSDL description of the web service is published. With this, BP 1.1 violations will be permitted, although the auto-generated test page will still display warnings.

Disabling BP 1.1 Conformance Verification

If you wish to completely disable BP 1.1 verification for your XML web service, you may do so by defining the following `<conformanceWarnings>` element within a proper `Web.config` file:

```
<configuration>
  <system.web>
    <webServices>
      <conformanceWarnings>
        <remove name='BasicProfile1_1'/>
      </conformanceWarnings>
    </webServices>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

■ **Note** The `[WebServiceBinding]` attribute can also be used to define the intended binding for specific methods via the `Name` property. Consult the .NET Framework 2.0 SDK documentation for further details.

Understanding the [WebMethod] Attribute

The `[WebMethod]` attribute must be applied to each method you wish to expose from an XML web service. Like most attributes, the `WebMethodAttribute` type may take a number of optional named properties. Let's walk through each possibility in turn.

Documenting a Web Method via the Description Property

Like the `[WebService]` attribute, the `Description` property of the `[WebMethod]` attribute allows you to describe the functionality of a particular web method:

```
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{
    [WebMethod(Description = "Subtracts two integers.")]
    public int Subtract(int x, int y) { return x - y; }

    [WebMethod(Description = "Adds two integers.")]
    public int Add(int x, int y) { return x + y; }
}
```

Under the hood, when you specify the `Description` property within a `[WebMethod]` attribute, the WSDL contract is updated with a new `<documentation>` element scoped at the method name level:

```
<wsdl:operation name="Add">
  <wsdl:documentation xmlns:wsdl="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/">
    Adds two integers.
  </wsdl:documentation>
  <wsdl:input message="tns:AddSoapIn" />
  <wsdl:output message="tns:AddSoapOut" />
</wsdl:operation>
```

Avoiding WSDL Name Clashes via the MessageName Property

One of the rules of WSI BP 1.1 is that each method within a WSDL document must be unique. Therefore, if you wish your XML web services to conform to BP 1.1, you should not overload methods in your implementation logic. For the sake of argument, however, assume that you have overloaded the `Add()` method so that the caller can pass two integer or float data types. You would find the following runtime error:

```
Both Single Add(Single, Single) and Int32 Add(Int32, Int32)
use the message name 'Add'. Use the MessageName property
attribute to specify unique of the WebMethod
custom message names for the methods.
```

Again, the best approach is to simply not overload the `Add()` method in the first place. If you must do so, the `MessageName` property of the `[WebMethod]` attribute can be used to resolve name clashes in your WSDL documents:

```
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{
...
    [WebMethod(Description = "Adds two float.",
        MessageName = "AddFloats")]
    public float Add(float x, float y) { return x + y; }

    [WebMethod(Description = "Adds two integers.",
        MessageName = "AddInts")]
    public int Add(int x, int y) { return x + y; }
}
```

Once you have done so, the generated WSDL document will internally refer to each overloaded version of `Add()` uniquely (`AddFloats` and `AddInts`). As far as the client-side proxy is concerned, however, there is only a single overloaded `Add()` method.

Building Stateful Web Services via the EnableSession Property

As you may recall from Chapter 24, the `Application` and `Session` properties allow an ASP.NET web application to maintain stateful data. XML web services gain the exact same functionality via the

System.Web.Services.WebService base class. For example, assume your CalculatorService maintains an application-level variable (and is thus available to each session) that holds the value of PI, as shown here:

```
public class CalcWebService: System.Web.Services.WebService
{
     // This web method provides access to an app-level variable
     // named SimplePI.
     [WebMethod(Description = "Get the simple value of PI.")]
     public float GetSimplePI()
     {  return (float)Application["SimplePI"]; }
     ...
}
```

The initial value of the SimplePI application variable could be established with the Application_Start() event handler defined in the Global.asax file. Insert a new global application class to your project (by right-clicking your project icon within Solution Explorer and selecting Add New Item) and implement Application_Start() as so:

```
<%@ Application Language="C#" %>
<script runat="server">
    void Application_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        Application["SimplePI"] = 3.14F;
    }
...
</script>
```

In addition to maintaining applicationwide variables, you may also make use of Session to maintain session-centric information. For the sake of illustration, implement the Session_Start() method in your Global.asax to assign a random number to each user who is logged on:

```
<%@ Application Language="C#" %>
<script runat="server">
...
    void Session_Start(Object sender, EventArgs e)
    {
        // To prove session state data is available from a web service,
        // simply assign a random number to each user.
        Random r = new Random();
        Session["SessionRandomNumber"] = r.Next(1000);
    }
...
</script>
```

For testing purposes, create a new web method in your Service class that returns the user's randomly assigned value:

```
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{
...
    [WebMethod(EnableSession = true,
     Description = "Get your random number!")]
    public int GetMyRandomNumber()
    { return (int)Session["SessionRandomNumber"]; }
}
```

Note that the [WebMethod] attribute has explicitly set the EnableSession property to true. This step is not optional, given that by default each web method has session state *disabled*. If you were

now to launch two or three browsers (to generate a set of session IDs), you would find that each logged-on user is returned a unique numerical token. For example, the first caller may receive the following XML:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?>
<int xmlns="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/WebServers">931</int>
```

while the second caller may find her value is 472:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?>
<int xmlns="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/WebServers">472</int>
```

Configuring Session State via Web.config

Finally, recall that a `Web.config` file may be updated to specify where state should be stored for the XML web service using the `<sessionState>` element (described in the previous chapter).

```
<sessionState
     mode="InProc"
     stateConnectionString="tcpip=127.0.0.1:42424"
     sqlConnectionString="data source=127.0.0.1;Trusted_Connection=yes"
     cookieless="false"
     timeout="20"
/>
```

■ **Source Code** The CalculatorService files are included under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

Exploring the Web Service Description Language (WSDL)

Over the last several examples, you have been exposed to partial WSDL snippets. Recall that WSDL is an XML-based grammar that describes how external clients can interact with the web methods at a given URL, using each of the supported wire protocols. In many ways, a WSDL document can be viewed as a contract between the web service client and the web service itself. To this end, it is yet another metalanguage. Specifically, WSDL is used to describe the following characteristics for each exposed web method:

- The name of the XML web methods
- The number of, type of, and ordering of parameters (if any)
- The type of return value (if any)
- The HTTP `GET`, HTTP `POST`, and SOAP calling conventions

In most cases, WSDL documents are generated automatically by the hosting web server. Recall that when you append the `?wsdl` suffix to a URL that points to an `*.asmx` file, the hosting web server will emit the WSDL document for the specified XML web service:

```
http://localhost/SomeWS/theWS.asmx?wsdl
```

Given that IIS will automatically generate WSDL for a given XML web service, you may wonder if you are required to deeply understand the syntax of the generated WSDL data. The answer typically depends on how your service is to be consumed by external applications. For in-house XML web services, the WSDL generated by your XML web server will be sufficient most of the time.

However, it is also possible to begin an XML web service project by authoring the WSDL document by hand (as mentioned earlier, this is termed the *WSDL first* approach). The biggest selling point for WSDL first has to do with interoperability concerns. Recall that prior to the WSI specification, it was not uncommon for various web service tools to generate incompatible WSDL descriptions. If you take a WSDL first approach, you can craft the document as required.

As you might imagine, taking a WSDL first approach would require you to have a very intimate view of the WSDL grammar, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, let's get to know the basic structure of a valid WSDL document. Once you understand the basics, you'll better understand the usefulness of the `wsdl.exe` command-line utility.

■ **Note** To see the most recent information on WSDL, visit `http://www.w3.org/tr/wsdl`.

Defining a WSDL Document

A valid WSDL document is opened and closed using the root `<definitions>` element. The opening tag typically defines various `xmlns` attributes. These qualify the XML namespaces that define various subelements. At a minimum, the `<definitions>` element will specify the namespace where the WSDL elements themselves are defined (`http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl`). To be useful, the opening `<definitions>` tag will also specify numerous XML namespaces that define simple data WSDL types, XML schema types, SOAP elements, and the target namespace. For example, here is the `<definitions>` section for CalculatorService:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<wsdl:definitions xmlns:soap="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/soap/"
xmlns:tm="http://microsoft.com/wsdl/mime/textMatching/"
xmlns:soapenc="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/soap/encoding/"
xmlns:mime="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/mime/"
xmlns:tns="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/"
xmlns:s="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
xmlns:soap12="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/soap12/"
xmlns:http="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/http/"
targetNamespace="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/"
xmlns:wsdl="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/">
...
</wsdl:definitions>
```

Within the scope of the root element, you will find five possible subelements. Thus, a bare-bones WSDL document would look something like the following:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<wsdl:definitions ...>
     <wsdl:types>
          <!-- List of types exposed from WS ->
     <wsdl:/types>
     <wsdl:message>
          <!-- Format of the messages ->
     <wsdl:/message>
     <wsdl:portType>
          <!-- Port information ->
     <wsdl:/portType>
     <wsdl:binding>
          <!-- Binding information ->
     <wsdl:/binding>
     <wsdl:service>
          <!-- Information about the XML web service itself ->
```

```
     <wsdl:/service>
< wsdl:/definitions>
```

As you would guess, each of these subelements will contain additional elements and attributes to further describe the intended functionality. Let's check out the key nodes in turn.

The <types> Element

First, we have the `<types>` element, which contains descriptions of any and all data types exposed from the web service. As you may know, XML itself defines a number of "core" data types, all of which are defined within the XML namespace: `http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema` (which appears in your `<definitions>` root element). For example, recall the `Subtract()` method of CalculatorService took two integer parameters. In terms of WSDL, the CLR `System.Int32` is described within a `<complexType>` element:

```
<s:element name="Subtract">
  <s:complexType>
    <s:sequence>
      <s:element minOccurs="1" maxOccurs="1" name="x" type="s:int" />
      <s:element minOccurs="1" maxOccurs="1" name="y" type="s:int" />
    </s:sequence>
  </s:complexType>
</s:element>
```

The integer that is returned from the `Subtract()` method is also described within the `<types>` element:

```
<s:element name="SubtractResponse">
  <s:complexType>
    <s:sequence>
      <s:element minOccurs="1" maxOccurs="1" name="SubtractResult" type="s:int" />
    </s:sequence>
  </s:complexType>
</s:element>
```

If you have a web method that returns or receives custom data types, they will also appear within a `<complexType>` element. You will see the details of how to expose custom .NET data types via a given web method a bit later in this chapter. For the sake of illustration, assume you have defined a web method that returns a structure named `Point`:

```
public struct Point
{
     public int x;
     public int y;
     public string pointName;
}
```

The WSDL description of this "complex type" would look like the following:

```
<s:complexType name="Point">
  <s:sequence>
    <s:element minOccurs="1" maxOccurs="1" name="x" type="s:int" />
    <s:element minOccurs="1" maxOccurs="1" name="y" type="s:int" />
    <s:element minOccurs="0" maxOccurs="1" name="pointName" type="s:string" />
  </s:sequence>
</s:complexType>
```

The <message> Element

The <message> element is used to define the format of the request and response exchange for a given web method. Given that a single web service allows multiple messages to be transmitted between the sender and receiver, it is permissible for a single WSDL document to define multiple <message> elements. Typically, these message definitions use the types defined in the <types> element.

Regardless of how many <message> elements are defined within a WSDL document, they tend to occur in pairs. The first definition represents the input-centric format of the message, while the second defines the output-centric format of the same message. For example, the Subtract() method of CalculatorService is defined by the following <message> element:

```
<wsdl:message name="SubtractSoapIn">
  <wsdl:part name="parameters" element="tns:Subtract" />
</wsdl:message>
<wsdl:message name="SubtractSoapOut">
  <wsdl:part name="parameters" element="tns:SubtractResponse" />
</wsdl:message>
```

Here, you are only viewing the SOAP binding of the service. As you may recall from the beginning of this chapter, XML web services can be invoked via SOAP, HTTP GET, and HTTP POST. Thus, if you were to enable HTTP POST bindings (explained later), the generated WSDL would also show the following <message> data:

```
<wsdl:message name="SubtractHttpPostIn">
  <part name="n1" type="s:string" />
  <part name="n2" type="s:string" />
<wsdl:/message>
<wsdl:message name="SubtractHttpPostOut">
  <part name="Body" element="s0:int" />
<wsdl:/message>
```

In reality, <message> elements are not all that useful in and of themselves. However, these message definitions are referenced by other aspects of a WSDL document.

■ **Note** Not all web methods require both a request and response. If a web method is a one-way method, then only a request <message> element is necessary. You can mark a web method as a one-way method by applying the [SoapDocumentMethod] attribute.

The <portType> Element

The <portType> element defines the characteristics of the various correspondences that can occur between the client and server, each of which is represented by an <operation> subelement. As you might guess, the most common operations would be SOAP, HTTP GET, and HTTP POST. Additional operations do exist, however. For example, the one-way operation allows a client to send a message to a given web server but does not receive a response (sort of a fire-and-forget method invocation). The solicit/response operation allows the server to issue a request while the client responds (which is the exact opposite of the request/response operation).

To illustrate the format of a possible <operation> subelement, here is the WSDL definition for the Subtract() method:

```
<wsdl:portType name="CalculatorWebServiceSoap">
  <wsdl:operation name="Subtract">
    <wsdl:input message="tns:SubtractSoapIn" />
    <wsdl:output message="tns:SubtractSoapOut" />
  </wsdl:operation>
<wsdl:/portType>
```

Note how the <input> and <output> elements make reference to the related message name defined within the <message> element. If HTTP POST were enabled for the Subtract() method, you would find the following additional <operation> element:

```
<wsdl:portType name="CalculatorWebServiceHttpPost">
  <wsdl:operation name="Subtract">
    <wsdl:input message="s0:SubtractHttpPostIn" />
    <wsdl:output message="s0:SubtractHttpPostOut" />
  <wsdl:/operation>
<wsdl:/portType>
```

Finally, be aware that if a given web method has been described using the Description property, the <operation> element will contain an embedded <documentation> element.

The <binding> Element

This element specifies the exact format of the HTTP GET, HTTP POST, and SOAP exchanges. By far and away, this is the most verbose of all the subelements contained in the <definition> root. For example, here is the <binding> element definition that describes how a caller may interact with the MyMethod() web method using SOAP:

```
<wsdl:binding name="CalculatorWebServiceSoap12"
  type="tns:CalculatorWebServiceSoap">
  <soap12:binding transport="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/soap/http" />
  <wsdl:operation name="Subtract">
    <soap12:operation soapAction="http://www.IntertechTraining.com/Subtract"
      style="document" />
    <wsdl:input>
      <soap12:body use="literal" />
    </wsdl:input>
    <wsdl:output>
      <soap12:body use="literal" />
    </wsdl:output>
  </wsdl:operation>
</wsdl:binding>
```

The <service> Element

Finally we have the <service> element, which specifies the characteristics of the web service itself (such as its URL). The chief duty of this element is to describe the set of ports exposed from a given web server. To do so, the <services> element makes use of any number of <port> subelements (not to be confused with the <portType> element). Here is the <service> element for CalculatorService:

```
<wsdl:service name="CalculatorWebService">
  <wsdl:documentation xmlns:wsdl="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/wsdl/">
    The Amazing Calculator Web Service
  </wsdl:documentation>
  <wsdl:port name="CalculatorWebServiceSoap"
    binding="tns:CalculatorWebServiceSoap">
    <soap:address location="http://localhost:1109/CalculatorService/Service.asmx" />
  </wsdl:port>
  <wsdl:port name="CalculatorWebServiceSoap12"
    binding="tns:CalculatorWebServiceSoap12">
    <soap12:address location=
      "http://localhost:1109/CalculatorService/Service.asmx" />
  </wsdl:port>
</wsdl:service>
```

So, as you can see, the WSDL automatically returned by IIS is not rocket science, but given that WSDL is an XML-based grammar, it is a bit on the verbose side. Nevertheless, now that you have a better understanding of WSDL's place in the world, let's dig a bit deeper into the XML web service wire protocols.

■ **Note** Recall that the `System.Web.Services.Description` namespace contains a plethora of types that allow you to programmatically read and manipulate raw WSDL (so check it out if you are so interested).

Revisiting the XML Web Service Wire Protocols

Technically, XML web services can use any RPC protocol to facilitate communication (such as DCOM or CORBA). However, most web server bundles this data into the body of an HTTP request and transmits it to the consumer using one of three core bindings (see Table 25-4).

Table 25-4. *XML Web Service Bindings*

Transmission Binding	Meaning in Life
HTTP `GET`	`GET` submissions append parameters to the query string of the URL.
HTTP `POST`	`POST` transmissions embed the data points into the header of the HTTP message rather than appending them to the query string.
SOAP	SOAP is a wire protocol that specifies how to submit data and invoke methods across the wire using XML.

While each approach leads to the same result (invoking a web method), your choice of wire protocol determines the types of parameters (and return types) that can be sent between each interested party. The SOAP protocol offers you the greatest flexibility, given that SOAP messages allow you to pass complex data types (as well as binary files) between the caller and XML web service. However, for completeness, let's check out the role of standard HTTP `GET` and `POST`.

HTTP GET and HTTP POST Bindings

Although `GET` and `POST` verbs may be familiar constructs, you must be aware that this method of transportation is not rich enough to represent such complex items as structures or classes. When you use `GET` and `POST` verbs, you can interact with web methods using only the types listed in Table 25-5.

Table 25-5. *Supported* `POST` *and* `GET` *Data Types*

Data Types	Meaning in Life
Enumerations	`GET` and `POST` verbs support the transmission of .NET `System.Enum` types, given that these types are represented as a static constant string.
Simple arrays	You can construct arrays of any primitive type.
Strings	`GET` and `POST` transmit all numerical data as a string token. *String* really refers to the string representation of CLR primitives such as `Int16`, `Int32`, `Int64`, `Boolean`, `Single`, `Double`, `Decimal`, and so forth.

By default, HTTP `GET` and HTTP `POST` bindings are not enabled for remote XML web service invocation. However, HTTP `POST` is enabled to allow a machine to invoke local web services (in fact, this is exactly what the autogenerated help page is leveraging behind the scenes). These settings are established in the `machine.config` file using the `<protocols>` element. Here is a partial snapshot:

```
<!--  In the machine.config file! -->
<webServices>
  <protocols>
    <add name="HttpSoap1.2" />
    <add name="HttpSoap" />
    <add name="Documentation" />
    <!-- HTTP GET/POST disabled! -->
    <!-- <add name="HttpPost"/> -->
    <!-- <add name="HttpGet"/> -->
    <!-- Used by the web service test page -->
    <add name="HttpPostLocalhost" />
  </protocols>
</webServices>
```

To re-enable HTTP `GET` or HTTP `POST` for a given web service, explicitly add in the `HttpPost` and `HttpGet` names within a local `Web.config` file:

```
<configuration>
  <system.web>
    <webServices>
      <protocols>
        <add name="HttpPost"/>
        <add name="HttpGet"/>
      </protocols>
    </webServices>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

Again, recall that if you make use of standard HTTP `GET` or HTTP `POST`, you are not able to build web methods that take complex types as parameters or return values (e.g., an ADO.NET `DataSet` or custom structure type). For simple web services, this limitation may be acceptable. However, if you make use of SOAP bindings, you are able to build much more elaborate XML web services.

SOAP Bindings

Although a complete examination of SOAP is beyond the scope of this text, understand that SOAP itself does not define a specific protocol and can thus be used with any number of existing Internet protocols (HTTP, SMTP, and others). The general role of SOAP, however, remains the same: provide a mechanism to invoke methods using complex types in a language- and platform-neutral manner. To do so, SOAP encodes each complex method with a SOAP message.

A SOAP message defines two core sections. First, we have the SOAP envelope, which can be understood as the conceptual container for the relevant information. Second, we have the rules that are used to describe the information in said message (placed into the SOAP body). An optional third section (the SOAP header) may be used to specify general information regarding the message itself, such as security or transactional information.

```
<soap:Envelope xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
xmlns:xsd="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
xmlns:soap="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/soap/envelope/">
     <soap:Header>
          <!-- Optional header information -->
     </soap:Header>
     <soap:Body>
          <!-- Method invocation information -->
     </soap:Body>
</soap:Envelope>
```

Viewing a SOAP Message

Although you are not required to understand the gory details of SOAP to build XML web services with the .NET platform, you are able to view the format of the SOAP message for each exposed web method using the autogenerated test page. For example, if you were to click the link for the `Add()` method of CalculatorService, you would find the following SOAP 1.1 request:

```
<soap:Envelope xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
xmlns:xsd="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
xmlns:soap="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/soap/envelope/">
  <soap:Body>
    <Add xmlns="http://www.IntertechTraining.com ">
      <x>int</x>
      <y>int</y>
    </Add>
  </soap:Body>
</soap:Envelope>
```

The corresponding SOAP 1.1 response looks like this:

```
<soap:Envelope xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
xmlns:xsd="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
xmlns:soap="http://schemas.xmlsoap.org/soap/envelope/">
  <soap:Body>
    <AddResponse xmlns="http://www.IntertechTraining.com ">
      <AddResult>int</AddResult>
    </AddResponse>
  </soap:Body>
</soap:Envelope>
```

The wsdl.exe Command-Line Utility

Now that you've completed a primer on WSDL and SOAP, let's begin to examine how to build client programs that communicate with remote XML web services using the `wsdl.exe` command-line tool. In a nutshell, `wsdl.exe` performs two major tasks:

- Generates a server-side file that functions as skeleton for implementing an XML web service
- Generates a client-side file that functions as the proxy to a remote XML web service

`wsdl.exe` supports a number of command-line flags, all of which can be viewed at the command prompt by specifying the `-?` option. Table 25-6 points out some of the more common arguments.

Table 25-6. *Select Options of* `wsdl.exe`

Command-Line Flag	Meaning in Life
`/appsettingurlkey`	Instructs `wsdl.exe` to build a proxy that does not make use of hard-coded URLs. Instead, the proxy class will be configured to read the URL from a client-side `*.config` file.
`/language`	Specifies the language to use for the generated proxy class: `CS` (C#; default) `VB` (Visual Basic .NET) `JS` (JScript) `VJS` (Visual J#) The default is C#.
`/namespace`	Specifies the namespace for the generated proxy or template. By default, your type will not be defined within a namespace definition.

Command-Line Flag	Meaning in Life
/out	Specifies the file in which to save the generated proxy code. If the file is not specified, the file name is based on the XML web service name.
/protocol	Specifies the protocol to use within the proxy code; SOAP is the default. However, you can also specify HttpGet or HttpPost to create a proxy that communicates using simple HTTP GET or POST verbs.
/serverInterface	Generates server-side interface bindings for an XML web service based on the WSDL document.

■ **Note** The /server flag of wsdl.exe has been deprecated under .NET 2.0. /serverInterface is now the preferred method to generate server-side skeleton code.

Transforming WSDL into a Server-Side XML Web Service Skeleton

One interesting use of the wsdl.exe utility is to generate server-side skeleton code (via the /serverInterface option) based on a WSDL document. Clearly, if you are interested in taking a WSDL first approach to building XML web services, this would be a very important option. Once this source code file has been generated, you have a solid starting point to provide the actual implementation of each web method.

Assume you have created WSDL document (CarBizObject.wsdl) that describes a single method named DeleteCar() that takes a single integer as input and returns nothing. This method is exposed from an XML web service named CarBizObject, which can be invoked using SOAP bindings.

To generate a server-side C# code file from this WSDL document, open a .NET-aware command window and specify the /serverInterface flag, followed by the name of the WSDL document you wish to process. Note that the WDSL document may be contained in a local *.wsdl file:

```
wsdl /serverInterface CarBizObject.wsdl
```

or it can be obtained dynamically from a given URL via the ?wsdl suffix:

```
wsdl /serverInterface http://localhost/CarService/CarBizObject.asmx?wsdl
```

Once wsdl.exe has processed the XML elements, you are presented with interface descriptions for each web method:

```
[System.Web.Services.WebServiceBindingAttribute(Name="CarBizObjectSoap",
  Namespace="http://IntertechTraining.com/")]
public partial interface ICarBizObjectSoap
{
...
    void RemoveCar(int carID);
}
```

Using these interfaces, you can define a class that implements the various methods of the XML web service.

■ **Source Code** The CarBizObject.wsdl file is included under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

Transforming WSDL into a Client-Side Proxy

Although undesirable, it is completely possible to construct a client-side code base that manually opens an HTTP connection, builds the SOAP message, invokes the web method, and translates the incoming stream of XML back into CTS data types. A much-preferred approach is to leverage `wsdl.exe` to generate a proxy class that maps to the web methods defined by a given `*.asmx` file.

To do so, you will specify (at a minimum) the name of the proxy file to be generated (via the `/out` flag) and the location of the WSDL document. By default, `wsdl.exe` will generate proxy code written in C#. However, if you wish to obtain proxy code in an alternative .NET language, make use of the `/language` flag. You should also be aware that by default, `wsdl.exe` generates a proxy that communicates with the remote XML web service using SOAP bindings. If you wish to build a proxy that leverages straight HTTP `GET` or HTTP `POST`, you may make use of the `/protocol` flag.

Another important point to be made regarding generating proxy code via `wsdl.exe` is that this tool truly needs the *WSDL* of the XML web service, not simply the name of the `*.asmx` file. Given this, understand that if you make use of `WebDev.WebServer.exe` to develop and test your services, you will most likely want to copy your project's content to an IIS virtual directory before generating a client-side proxy.

For the sake of illustration, assume that you have created a new IIS virtual directory (CalcService), which contains the content for the CalculatorService project. Once you have done so, you can generate the client proxy code as so:

```
wsdl /out:proxy.cs http://localhost/CalcService/Service.asmx?wsdl
```

As a side note, be aware that `wsdl.exe` will not define a .NET namespace to wrap the generated C# types unless you specify the `/n` flag at the command prompt:

```
wsdl /out:proxy.cs /n:CalculatorClient
    http://localhost/CalcService/Service.asmx?wsdl
```

Examining the Proxy Code

If you open up the generated proxy file, you'll find a type that derives from `System.Web.Services.Protocols.SoapHttpClientProtocol` (unless, of course, you specified an alternative binding via the `/protocols` option):

```
public partial class CalculatorWebService :
    System.Web.Services.Protocols.SoapHttpClientProtocol
{
    ...
}
```

This base class defines a number of members leveraged within the implementation of the proxy type. Table 25-7 describes some (but not all) of these members.

Table 25-7. *Core Members of the* `SoapHttpClientProtocol` *Type*

Inherited Members	Meaning in Life
`BeginInvoke()`	This method starts an asynchronous invocation of the web method.
`CancelAsync()`	This method (new to .NET 2.0) cancels an asynchronous call to an XML web service method, unless the call has already completed.
`EndInvoke()`	This method ends an asynchronous invocation of the web method.
`Invoke()`	This method synchronously invokes a method of the web service.

Inherited Members	Meaning in Life
`InvokeAsync()`	This method (new to .NET 2.0) is the preferred way to synchronously invoke a method of the web service.
`Proxy`	This property gets or sets proxy information for making a web service request through a firewall.
`Timeout`	This property gets or sets the timeout (in milliseconds) used for synchronous calls.
`Url`	This property gets or sets the base URL to the server to use for requests.
`UserAgent`	This property gets or sets the value for the user agent header sent with each request.

The Default Constructor

The default constructor of the proxy hard-codes the URL of the remote web service and stores it in the inherited `Url` property:

```
public CalculatorWebService()
{
    this.Url = "http://localhost/CalcService/Service.asmx";
}
```

The obvious drawback to this situation is that if the XML web service is renamed or relocated, the proxy class must be updated and recompiled. To build a more flexible proxy type, `wsdl.exe` provides the `/appsettingurlkey` flag (which may be abbreviated to `/urlkey`). When you specify this flag at the command line, the proxy's constructor will contain logic that reads the URL using a key contained within a client-side `*.config` file.

```
wsdl /out:proxy.cs /n:CalcClient /urlkey:CalcUrl
    http://localhost/CalcService/Service.asmx?wsdl
```

If you now check out the default constructor of the proxy, you will find the following logic (note that if the correct key cannot be found, the hard-coded URL will be used as a backup):

```
public CalculatorWebService()
{
  string urlSetting =
    System.Configuration.ConfigurationManager.AppSettings["CalcUrl"];
    if ((urlSetting != null))
    {
        this.Url = urlSetting;
    }
    else
    {
        this.Url = "http://localhost/CalcService/Service.asmx";
    }
}
```

The corresponding client-side `app.config` file will look like this:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" ?>
<configuration>
  <appSettings>
    <add key="CalcUrl" value="http://localhost/CalcService/Service.asmx"/>
  </appSettings>
</configuration>
```

Synchronous Invocation Support

The generated proxy also defines synchronous support for each web method. For example, the synchronous implementation of the `Subtract()` method is implemented as so:

```
public int Subtract(int x, int y)
{
    object[] results = this.Invoke("Subtract", new object[] {x, y});
    return ((int)(results[0]));
}
```

Notice that the caller passes in two `System.Int32` parameters that are packaged as an array of `System.Objects`. Using late binding, the `Invoke()` method will pass these arguments to the Subtract method located at the established URL. Once this (blocking) call completes, the incoming XML is processed, and the result is cast back to the caller as `System.Int32`.

Asynchronous Invocation Support

Support for invoking a given web method asynchronously has changed quite a bit from .NET 1.*x*. As you might recall from previous experience, .NET 1.1 proxies made use of `BeginXXX()/EndXXX()` methods to invoke a web method on a secondary thread of execution. For example, consider the following `BeginSubtract()` and `EndSubtract()` methods:

```
public System.IAsyncResult BeginSubtract(int x, int y,
    System.AsyncCallback callback, object asyncState)
{
    return this.BeginInvoke("Subtract", new object[] {x, y},
    callback, asyncState);
}
public int EndSubtract(System.IAsyncResult asyncResult)
{
    object[] results = this.EndInvoke(asyncResult);
    return ((int)(results[0]));
}
```

While `wsdl.exe` still generates these familiar `Begin/End` methods, under .NET 2.0 they have been deprecated and are replaced by the new `XXXAsync()` methods:

```
public void SubtractAsync(int x, int y)
{
    this.SubtractAsync(x, y, null);
}
```

These new `XXXAsync()` methods (as well as a related `CancelAsync()` method) work in conjunction with an autogenerated helper method (being an overloaded version of a specific `XXXAsync()` method) which handles the asynchronous operation using C# event syntax. If you examine the proxy code, you will see that `wsdl.exe` has generated (for each web method) a custom delegate, custom event, and custom "event args" class to obtain the result.

Building the Client Application

Now that you better understand the internal composition of the generated proxy, let's put it to use. Create a new console application named CalculatorClient, insert your `proxy.cs` file into the project using Project ➤ Add Existing Item, and add a reference to the `System.Web.Services.dll` assembly. Next, update your `Main()` method as so:

```
class Program
{
    static void Main(string[] args)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("***** Fun with WS Proxies *****\n");
        // Make the proxy.
        CalculatorWebService ws = new CalculatorWebService();

        // Call the Add() method synchronously.
        Console.WriteLine("10 + 10 = {0}", ws.Add(10, 10));

        // Call the Subtract method asynchronously
        // using the new .NET 2.0 event approach.
        ws.SubtractCompleted += new
            SubtractCompletedEventHandler(ws_SubtractCompleted);
        ws.SubtractAsync(50, 45);

        // Keep console running to make sure we get our subtraction result.
        Console.ReadLine();
    }

    static void ws_SubtractCompleted(object sender, SubtractCompletedEventArgs e)
    {
        Console.WriteLine("Your answer is: {0}", e.Result);
    }
}
```

Notice that the new .NET 2.0 asynchronous invocation logic does indeed directly map to the C# event syntax, which as you might agree is cleaner than needing to work with `BeginXXX()/EndXXX()` method calls, the `IAsyncResult` interface, and the `AsyncCallback` delegate.

■ **Source Code** The CalculatorClient project can be found under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

Generating Proxy Code Using Visual Studio 2005

Although `wsdl.exe` provides a number of command-line arguments that give you ultimate control over how a proxy class will be generated, Visual Studio 2005 also allows you to quickly generate a proxy file using the Add Web Reference dialog box (which you can activated from the Project menu). As you can see from Figure 25-6, you are able to obtain references to existing XML web services located in a variety of places.

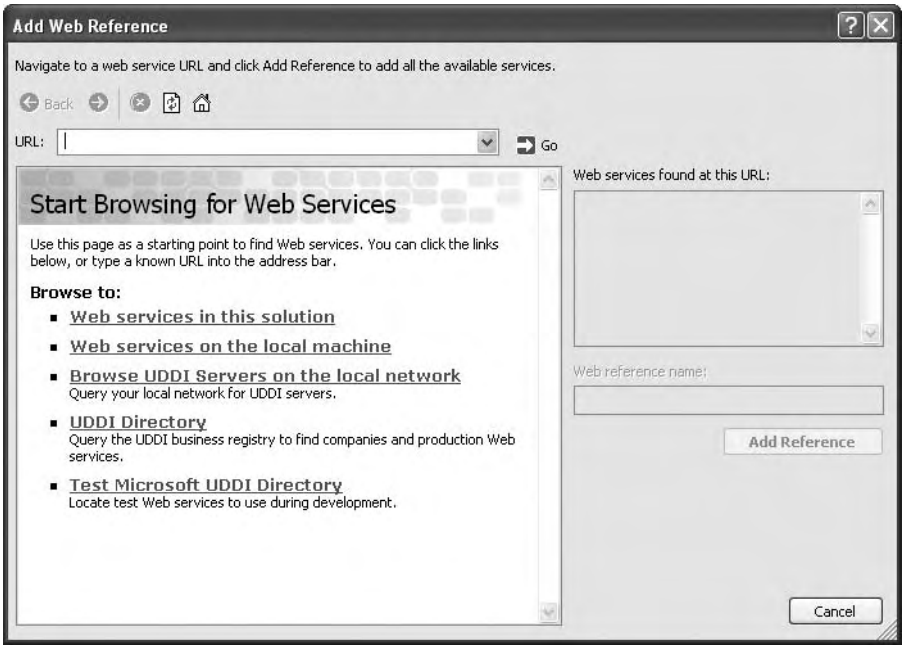

Add Web Reference
Navigate to a web service URL and click Add Reference to add all the available services.
Back
URL:
Go
Start Browsing for Web Services
Use this page as a starting point to find Web services. You can click the links below, or type a known URL into the address bar.
Browse to:
Web services in this solution
Web services on the local machine
Browse UDDI Servers on the local network
Query your local network for UDDI servers.
UDDI Directory
Query the UDDI business registry to find companies and production Web services.
Test Microsoft UDDI Directory
Locate test Web services to use during development.
Web services found at this URL:
Web reference name:
Add Reference
Cancel

Figure 25-6. *The Add Web Reference dialog box*

■ **Note** The Add Web Reference dialog box cannot reference XML web services hosted with `WebDev.WebServer.exe`.

Notice that not only are you able to obtain a list of XML web services on your local development machine, but you may also query various UDDI catalogs (which you'll do at the end of this chapter). In any case, once you type a valid URL that points to a given `*.wsdl` or `*.asmx` file, your project will contain a new proxy class. Do note that the proxy's namespace (which is based on the URL of origin) will be nested within your client's .NET namespace. Thus, if you have a client named MyClientApp that added a reference to a web service on your local machine you would need to specify the following C# `using` directive:

```
using MyClientApp.localhost;
```

■ **Note** As of Visual Studio 2005, the Add Web Reference dialog box automatically adds an `app.config` file to your project that contains the URL of the referenced XML web service or updates an existing `app.config` file.

Exposing Custom Types from Web Methods

In the final example of this chapter, you'll examine how to build web services that expose custom types as well as more exotic types from the .NET base class libraries. To illustrate this, you'll create a new XML web service that is capable of processing arrays, custom types, and ADO.NET `DataSets`. To begin, create a new XML web service named CarSalesInfoWS that is hosted under an IIS virtual directory.

Exposing Arrays

Create a web method named `GetSalesTagLines()`, which returns an array of strings that represent the current sales for various automobiles, and another named `SortCarMakes()`, which allows the caller to pass in an array of unsorted strings and obtain a new array of sorted strings:

```
[WebService(Namespace = "http://IntertechTraining.com/",
  Description = "A car-centric web service",
  Name = "CarSalesInfoWS")]
[WebServiceBinding(ConformsTo = WsiProfiles.BasicProfile1_1)]
public class Service : System.Web.Services.WebService
{
    [WebMethod(Description = "Get current discount blurbs")]
    public string[] GetSalesTagLines()
    {
        string[] currentDeals = {"Colt prices slashed 50%!",
               "All BMWs come with standard 8-track",
               "Free Pink Caravans...just ask me!"};
        return currentDeals;
    }

    [WebMethod(Description = "Sorts a list of car makes")]
    public string[] SortCarMakes(string[] theCarsToSort)
    {
        Array.Sort(theCarsToSort);
        return theCarsToSort;
    }
}
```

■ **Note** The default test page generated by `DefaultWsdlHelpGenerator.aspx` cannot invoke methods that take arrays of types as parameters.

Exposing Structures

The SOAP protocol is also able to transport XML representations of custom data types (both classes and structures). XML web services make use of the `XmlSerializer` type to encode the type as XML (see Chapter 17 for details). Recall that the `XmlSerializer`

- Cannot serialize private data. It serializes only public fields and properties.
- Requires that each serialized class provide a default constructor.
- Does not require the use of the `[Serializable]` attribute.

This being said, our next web method will return an array of `SalesInfoDetails` structures, defined as so:

```
// A custom type.
public struct SalesInfoDetails
{
     public string info;
     public DateTime dateExpired;
     public string Url;
}
```

Another point of interest regarding the `XmlSerializer` is the fact that it allows you to have fine-grained control over how the type is represented. By default, the `SalesInfoDetails` structure is serialized by encoding each piece of field data as a unique XML element:

```
<SalesInfoDetails>
  <info>Colt prices slashed 50%!</info>
  <dateExpired>2004-12-02T00:00:00.0000000-06:00</dateExpired>
  <Url>http://www.CarsRUs.com</Url>
</SalesInfoDetails>
```

If you wish to change this default behavior, you can adorn your type definitions using attributes found within the `System.Xml.Serialization` namespace (again, see Chapter 17 for full details):

```
public struct SalesInfoDetails
{
    public string info;
    [XmlAttribute]
    public DateTime dateExpired;
    public string Url;
}
```

This yields the following XML data representation:

```
<SalesInfoDetails dateExpired="2004-12-02T00:00:00">
  <info>Colt prices slashed 50%!</info>
  <Url>http://www.CarsRUs.com</Url>
</SalesInfoDetails>
```

The implementation of `GetSalesInfoDetails()` returns a populated array of this custom structure as follows:

```
[WebMethod(Description="Get details of current sales")]
public SalesInfoDetails[] GetSalesInfoDetails()
{
     SalesInfoDetails[] theInfo = new SalesInfoDetails[3];
     theInfo[0].info = "Colt prices slashed 50%!";
     theInfo[0].dateExpired = DateTime.Parse("12/02/04");
     theInfo[0].Url= "http://www.CarsRUs.com";
     theInfo[1].info = "All BMWs come with standard 8-track";
     theInfo[1].dateExpired = DateTime.Parse("8/11/03");
     theInfo[1].Url= "http://www.Bmws4U.com";
     theInfo[2].info = "Free Pink Caravans...just ask me!";
     theInfo[2].dateExpired = DateTime.Parse("12/01/09");
     theInfo[2].Url= "http://www.AllPinkVans.com";
     return theInfo;
}
```

Exposing ADO.NET DataSets

To wrap up your XML web service, here is one final web method that returns a `DataSet` populated with the Inventory table the Cars database you created during our examination of ADO.NET in Chapter 22:

```
// Return all cars in inventory table.
[WebMethod(Description =
  "Returns all autos in the Inventory table of the Cars database")]
public DataSet GetCurrentInventory()
{
     // Fill the DataSet with the Inventory table.
```

```
    SqlConnection sqlConn = new SqlConnection();
    sqlConn.ConnectionString = "data source=localhost; initial catalog=Cars;" +
        "uid=sa; pwd=";
    SqlDataAdapter myDA=
        new SqlDataAdapter("Select * from Inventory", sqlConn);
    DataSet ds = new DataSet();
    myDA.Fill(ds, "Inventory");
    return ds;
}
```

■ **Source Code** The CarsSalesInfoWS files can be found under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

A Windows Forms Client

To test your new XML web service, create a Windows Forms application and reference CarsSalesInfoWS using the Visual Studio 2005 Add Web References dialog box (see Figure 25-7).

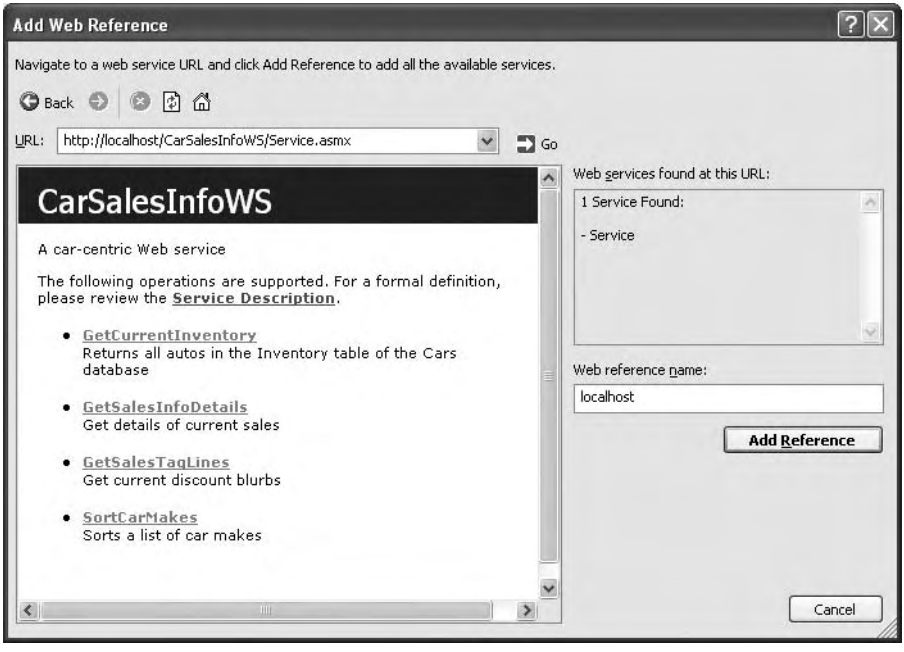


Figure 25-7. *Referencing CarsSalesInfoWS*

At this point, simply make use of the generated proxy to invoke the exposed web methods. Here is one possible Form implementation:

```
using CarsSalesInfoClient.localhost;
...
namespace CarsSalesInfoClient
{
    public partial class MainWindow : Form
    {
```

```
        private CarSalesInfoWS ws = new CarSalesInfoWS();
...
        private void MainWindow_Load(object sender, EventArgs e)
        {
            // Bind DataSet to grid.
            inventoryDataGridView.DataSource
                = ws.GetCurrentInventory().Tables[0];
        }

        private void btnGetTagLines_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
        {
            string[] tagLines = ws.GetSalesTagLines();
            foreach (string tag in tagLines)
                listBoxTags.Items.Add(tag);
        }
        private void btnGetAllDetails_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
        {
            SalesInfoDetails[] theSkinny = ws.GetSalesInfoDetails();
            foreach (SalesInfoDetails s in theSkinny)
            {
                string d = string.Format("Info: {0}\nURL:{1}\nExpiration Date:{2}",
                    s.info, s.Url, s.dateExpired);
                MessageBox.Show(d, "Details");
            }
        }
    }
}
```

Figure 25-8 shows a possible test run.

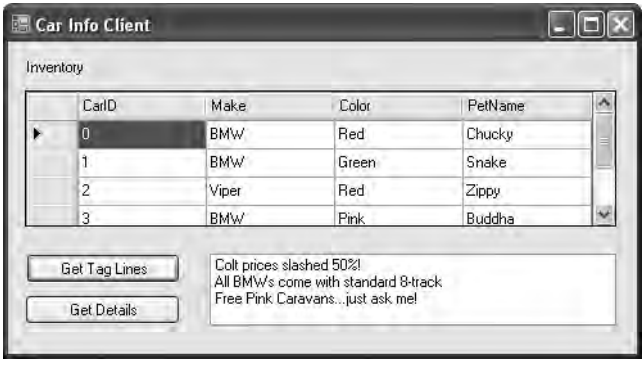


Figure 25-8. *The CarsSalesInfo client*

Client-Side Type Representation

When clients set a reference to a web service that exposes custom types, the proxy class file also contains language definitions for each custom public type. Thus, if you were to examine the client-side representation of SalesInfoDetails (within the generated `Reference.cs` file), you would see that each field has been encapsulated by a strongly typed property (also note that this type is now defined as a *class* rather than a structure):

```
[System.SerializableAttribute()]
[System.Xml.Serialization.XmlTypeAttribute
  (Namespace="http://IntertechTraining.com/")]
public partial class SalesInfoDetails {
    private string infoField;
    private string urlField;
    private System.DateTime dateExpiredField;

    public string info
    {
        get { return this.infoField; }
        set { this.infoField = value; }
    }
    public string Url
    {
        get { return this.urlField; }
        set { this.urlField = value; }
    }
    [System.Xml.Serialization.XmlAttributeAttribute()]
    public System.DateTime dateExpired
    {
        get { return this.dateExpiredField; }
        set { this.dateExpiredField = value; }
    }
}
```

Now, understand, of course, that like .NET remoting, types that are serialized across the wire as XML do not retain implementation logic. Thus, if the `SalesInfoDetails` structure supported a set of public methods, the proxy generator will fail to account for them (as they are not expressed in the WSDL document in the first place!). However, if you were to distribute a client-side assembly that contained the implementation code of the client-side type, you would be able to leverage the type-specific logic. Doing so would require a .NET-aware machine, though.

■ **Source Code** The CarSalesInfoClient projects can be found under the Chapter 25 subdirectory.

Understanding the Discovery Service Protocol (UDDI)

It is a bit ironic that the typical first step taken by a client to chat with a remote web service is the final topic of this chapter. The reason for such an oddball flow is the fact that the process of identifying whether or not a given web service exists using UDDI is not only optional, but also unnecessary in a vast majority of cases.

Until XML web services becomes the de facto standard of distributed computing, most web services will be leveraged by companies tightly coupled with a given vendor. Given this, the company and vendor at large already know about each other, and therefore have no need to query a UDDI server to see if the web service in question exists. However, if the creator of an XML web service wishes to allow the world at large to access the exposed functionality to any number of external developers, the web service may be posted to a UDDI catalog.

UDDI is an initiative that allows web service developers to post a commercial web service to a well-known repository. Despite what you might be thinking, UDDI is not a Microsoft-specific technology. In fact, IBM and Sun Microsystems have an equal interest in the success of the UDDI initiative. As you would expect, numerous vendors host UDDI catalogs. For example, Microsoft's

official UDDI website can be found at `http://uddi.microsoft.com`. The official website of UDDI (`http://www.uddi.org`) provides numerous white papers and SDKs that allow you to build internal UDDI servers.

Interacting with UDDI via Visual Studio 2005

Recall that the Add Web Reference dialog box allows you not only to obtain a list of all XML web services located on your current development machine (as well as a well-known URL) but also to submit queries to UDDI servers. Basically, you have the following options:

- Browse for a UDDI server on your company intranet.
- Browse the Microsoft-sponsored UDDI production server.
- Browse the Microsoft-sponsored UDDI test server.

Assume that you are building an application that needs to discover the current weather forecast on a per–zip code basis. Your first step would be to query a UDDI catalog with the following question:

- "Do you know of any web services that pertain to weather data?"

If it is the case that the UDDI server has a list of weather-aware web services, you are returned a list of all registered URLs that export the functionality of your query. Referencing this list, you are able to pick the specific web service you wish to communicate with and eventually obtain the WSDL document that describes the functionality of the weather-centric functionality.

As a quick example, create a brand-new console application project and activate the Add Web Reference dialog box. Next, select the Test Microsoft UDDI Directory link, which will bring you to the Microsoft UDDI test server. At this point, enter **weather** as a search criterion. Once the UDDI catalog has been queried, you will receive a list of all relevant XML web services. When you find an XML web service you are interested in programming against, add a reference to your current project. As you would expect, the raw WSDL will be parsed by the tool to provide you with a C# proxy.

■ **Note** Understand that the UDDI test center is just that: a test center. Don't be too surprised if you find a number of broken links. When you query production-level UDDI servers, URLs tend to be much more reliable, given that companies typically need to pay some sort of fee to be listed.

Summary

This chapter exposed you to the core building blocks of .NET web services. The chapter began by examining the core namespaces (and core types in these namespaces) used during web service development. As you learned, web services developed using the .NET platform require little more than applying the `[WebMethod]` attribute to each member you wish to expose from the XML web service type. Optionally, your types may derive from `System.Web.Services.WebService` to obtain access to the `Application` and `Session` properties (among other things). This chapter also examined three key related technologies: a lookup mechanism (UDDI), a description language (WSDL), and a wire protocol (`GET`, `POST`, or SOAP).

Once you have created any number of `[WebMethod]`-enabled members, you can interact with a web service through an intervening proxy. The `wsdl.exe` utility generates such a proxy, which can be used by the client like any other C# type. As an alternative to the `wsdl.exe` command-line tool, Visual Studio 2005 offers similar functionality via the Add Web Reference dialog box.

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